DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 419 055 UD 032 300

AUTHOR	Alcorso, Caroline
TITLE	Non-English Speaking Background Immigrant Women in the Workforce. Working Papers on Multiculturalism Paper No. 4.
INSTITUTION	Wollongong Univ., New South Wales (Australia). Centre for Multicultural Studies.
SPONS AGENCY	Australian Office of Multicultural Affairs, Canberra.
ISBN	ISBN-0-642-16158-5
ISSN	ISSN-1035-8129
PUB DATE	1991-00-00
NOTE	133p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Economic Factors; Employed Women; *Employment Patterns; *Females; Foreign Countries; *Immigrants; Immigration; Interviews; *Labor Force; *Limited English Speaking; Low Income Groups; Questionnaires; Training; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Australia

ABSTRACT

This report presents the findings of a study into the experiences of non-English speaking background (NESB) migrant women in the Australian workforce. The fieldwork, which involved interviewing over 100 immigrant women living and working in Sydney, was carried out in 1988 and 1989. The study also involved an extensive review of Australian and international literature on immigrant women in the workforce and the analysis of recent census and labor force survey data. A particular focus was the experience of newly arrived immigrants, including the relationship between their premigration histories, their participation in the workforce in Australia, and their domestic and family responsibilities. Although the economic and social conditions of Australia have changed considerably in the post-war period, the similarities in the lives of women immigrants arriving in the 1950s and 1960s were more marked than the differences. Their place in the economy has altered little, and employment continues to play a key role in structuring women's lives despite the development of an increased role for the state through ethnic affairs policies. Little evidence was found to support the theory that immigrants' work force experiences reflected their pre-migration capital endowments. Instead, women from a variety of backgrounds ended up, after immigrating to Australia, in low status, unpleasant, and unrewarding jobs. Unemployment emerges as the greatest difficulty encountered by newly arrived women in Australia. The last chapter makes recommendations in the areas of vocational guidance and training, equal employment opportunity, work conditions, participation in trade unions, and child care and family support. An appendix contains the study questionnaire. (Contains 91 references.) (SLD)

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Working Papers on Multiculturalism

Paper No. 4

Non-English Speaking Background Immigrant Women in the Workforce

ALCORSO

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Working Papers in Multiculturalism No.4

Non-English Speaking Background Immigrant Women in the Workforce

Caroline Alcorso

Published for
The Office of Multicultural Affairs, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet,
by
The Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong, Australia

UDO32307

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Published by

The Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong
P.O. Box 1144
Wollongong, 2500
Australia

for

The Office of Multicultural Affairs, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Canberra, 2600
Australia

Co-ordination: Bill Cope and Adriana Hassapis (CMS)
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Distribution enquiries: Office of Multicultural Affairs

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Commonwealth Government, the Office of Multicultural Affairs or the Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong.

National Library Of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication Data:

Alcorso, Caroline.
Non-English speaking background immigrant women in the workforce

Bibliography.
ISBN 0 642 16158 5.

1. Minority women - Employment - Australia. I. Australia. Office of Multicultural Affairs. II. University of Wollongong. Centre for Multicultural Studies. III. Title. (Series : Working papers in multiculturalism ; no. 4)

331.620994

SERIES ISSN 1035-8129

Text printing and binding by the University of Wollongong Printery
Covers printed by Meglamedia (02) 519 1044

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements p.7

Summary p.8

1. The study and the survey group p.10

1.1 The focus of the research

1.2 Research methodology

1.3 The characteristics of the sample

1.4 Interviewing as a research strategy

2. The literature on migrant women p.19

2.1 Introduction
2.1.1 Migrant women as workers
2.1.2 The jobs migrant women do
2.1.3 The decline of the manufacturing industry in Australia
2.1.4 The deregulation of employment relations

2.2 Australian literature
2.2.1 The 'definers of public knowledge'
2.2.2 Outworkers
2.2.3 The state and knowledge about migrant women
2.2.4 A more 'optimistic' picture?
2.2.5 Other Australian literature concerning immigrant women

2.3 International literature on minority women
2.3.1 Changes in gender relations
2.3.2 The role of the state
2.3.3 The ethnic economy

2.4 A statistical picture of NESB migrant women's work in Australia
2.4.1 Migrant women's employment status by industry and occupation
2.4.2 The involvement in manufacturing of women arriving in Australia at different times
2.4.3 Unemployment rates
2.4.4 Italian, Lebanese, Latin American and Vietnamese women in Australia
2.5 Conclusion

3. Findings p.49

3.1 Some women's work histories

3.2 Premigration training and work

3.3 Finding work in Australia
3.3.1 Planning to get a job in Australia
3.3.2 Entering and leaving the workforce

3.3.3 How do migrant women find jobs in Australia?
3.3.4 How hard is finding employment in Australia?

3.4 Patterns of paid work in Australia
3.4.1 Types of jobs and labour market segmentation
3.4.2 Changing jobs
3.4.3 The need to work and the future

3.5 Pay

3.6 Working conditions and the evaluation of jobs
3.6.1 Award conditions
3.6.2 The working environment
3.6.3 Occupational health and work injuries
3.6.4 Factors affecting working conditions

3.7 Racism and other aspects of working life
3.7.1 Relationships with other workers
3.7.2 Relationships with bosses and supervisors
3.7.3 Sex-based harassment
3.7.4 Trade unions
3.7.5 Learning English
3.7.6 Travelling from home to work

3.8 Households, husbands and domestic work
3.8.1 Living arrangements
3.8.2 Husbands' jobs
3.8.3 Domestic work

3.8.4 Working: the effect on relationships

3.8.5 Caring for children

4. Conclusion and recommendations p.101

4.1 Finding a job, the role of the C.E.S. and the need for vocational guidance

4.2 Labour market segmentation and equal employment opportunity

4.3 Work conditions: another old story

4.4 Trade unions

4.5 Unemployment

4.6 Childcare and family support.

Afterword: A note on researching migrant women p.115

Bibliography p.118

Appendix p.126

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was funded by the Office of Multicultural Affairs. In addition some funds from the Centre for Multicultural Studies were used.

The research was carried out between October 1988 and February 1989 in Sydney. Chiara Cagliaris helped organise the fieldwork, carried out data analysis and conducted some of the interviews. Naheda Sadek, Vittoria Pasquini, Anh Thu Thi Tran, Juana Zepeda and Veronica Oxman conducted most of the interviews, and all the women made important contributions to the ideas and arguments presented in the final report. The work of David Tait (Social Facts) in assisting us with the survey analysis and in obtaining and exploring with us the quantitative labour force data used in this report was invaluable. The excellent secretarial work of Charmiane Poulton and Wendy MacFarlane was also greatly appreciated.

Finally, I would like to thank Annie Phizacklea (Warwick University, U.K.), Stephen Castles (Centre for Multicultural Studies) and Ghassan Hage for their most helpful comments and suggestions about this report and the study generally.

SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a study into the experiences of NESB migrant women in the workforce. The fieldwork, which involved interviewing over one hundred immigrant women living and working in Sydney, was carried out between October 1988 and February 1989. The study also involved an extensive review of Australian and international literature on immigrant women in the workforce and the analysis of recent census and labour force survey data.

The study focussed particularly on the experiences of newly arrived migrant women and examined many aspects of women's employment experiences in Australia including the relationship between women's pre-migration histories, their participation in the workforce in Australia and their domestic and family responsibilities.

Although economic and social conditions in Australia have changed considerably in the post-war period, the study found that the continuities in the lives of women immigrants arriving in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s and those arriving today were more marked than the differences. It would seem that their place in the economy has altered little, and that employment continues to play the key role in structuring women's lives despite the development of an increased role for the state through ethnic affairs policies.

Little evidence was found to support the theory that immigrants' work force experiences reflect their pre-migration human capital endowments. Instead, we found that women from a variety of different backgrounds finished up, after emigrating to Australia, in similarly low status, unpleasant and unrewarding jobs - jobs which for many represented substantial downward mobility. These women experienced the segmentation of the labour market as a constraining framework, directing them towards certain types of jobs and limiting their opportunities to move out of them.

The report presents fresh evidence of immigrant women's employment-related problems, many of which have been documented previously. Unemployment emerges as the greatest difficulty encountered by newly arrived women in Australia today.

In the last chapter, recommendations in the areas of vocational guidance and training, equal employment opportunity, work conditions, women's participation in trade unions and childcare and family support are made. A reflection on the research methodology used in this study, and alternatives to it, concludes the report.

CHAPTER ONE: THE STUDY AND THE SURVEY GROUP

This report presents the findings of a six-month research project conducted for the Office of Multicultural Affairs between October 1988 and February 1989. The aim of the project was to:

> Examine the specific problems of non-English speaking women in the labour force, particularly those with shorter periods of residence in Australia (OMA 1988:4).

OMA has funded this and other focused studies in order to provide information for the National Agenda on Multiculturalism, to be finalised in 1989; however, we are convinced that its findings are of relevance to gender and employment issues beyond this sphere as well.

Women and work (or gender relations, production and reproduction, to use more academic terminology) have been the focus of much feminist and sociological writing over the last twenty years and the issues that have been raised have also informed analyses of the dynamics of immigration and ethnic relations. Some of the questions that have been posed in regard to migrant women are (see Chapter Two for a fuller discussion):

- Has the entry of immigrant women from rural and /or peasant backgrounds into waged work in advanced capitalist societies been a liberating or oppressive process?
- How does the cultural heritage of ethnic minority women, and their role in the family, influence their behaviour in the workforce?
- How far does class membership cut across ethnic diversity and generate solidarity on the shopfloor among women workers?

As well as documenting the empirical findings of our study, the discussion in this report will touch on these and other debates.

1.1 The focus of the research

The research was of a qualitative type, aiming to explore in some depth newly arrived immigrant women's experiences and contrasting these with experiences of a group of migrant women who arrived in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s - in other words, before the end of the so-called 'long boom'.

Drawing on the findings of earlier studies of migrant women, and the expressed concerns of women themselves in government and community forums, we decided that our survey should focus on a number of specific issues:

- Entry and re-entry to the labour force;
- Working conditions experienced by migrant women, both those doing factory-based and home-based work;
- The type of employment contract migrant women had - i.e. the degree of permanency, whether they were working on a part or full-time basis, the nature of the employment relationship and so on;
- Issues and experiences in different types of jobs: in particular, comparing cleaning and other service sector jobs with factory work;
- Relationships between the women and others with whom they worked including employers and supervisors;
- Experiences of racism and discrimination;
- Relationships with trade unions;
- Problems migrant women share with other women - such as sex-based harassment;
- English language difficulties and language learning;
- The women's domestic role, the familial context of their work and the relation between their paid and unpaid work.

1.2 Research methodology

The research involved a survey of different groups of non-English speaking background (NESB) women who had immigrated to Australia, selected for their particular characteristics. Recently arrived women born in:

Indo-China
South America
the Middle East

were chosen and a longer-settled group of women were also selected for comparative purposes. In addition, respondents were sought from a range of the industries and occupations.

Women were located mainly through the contacts the research team, and in particular the bilingual interviewers, had in the four ethnic communities. Potential respondents were also referred to us by community workers and union representatives; interviews with others were arranged through contact with their employers. All interviews were conducted in people's homes except those arranged by employers: these were conducted at the workplace.

Migrant women in Australia are over-represented in the manufacturing industry (and in particular in some types of manufacturing) and in some areas of community and personal services industries such as cleaning. Our intention was to contrast the work experiences migrant women have in Australia in different industries, in order to highlight the problems and advantages of each and to relate these to the economic dynamics and characteristics of the industry.

However, because at the outset of this project we lacked data detailing exactly where migrant women work and which jobs they do, and because of time needed to devise such a complex sample, this part of our initial goal proved too ambitious for this project. Better representation of women from a broader range of areas would have been possible in a larger and lengthier project.[1] In fact, as we will discuss in the conclusion, our project could usefully be seen as a pilot for a broader, more in-depth project to be undertaken in the future. Thus, the composition of our final sample was constrained by the factors noted above; its precise characteristics will be described below.

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1 In fact, the statistical material material we have collected as part of this study, some of which is presented in Chapter Two, has gone some way to alleviating the lack of data on this topic.

A questionnaire (reproduced in the Appendix) was developed on the basis of several unstructured discussions held with migrant women at the beginning of the project. It was refined through extensive piloting and the final version was used as the basis of the discussions with all the women interviewed. Basically, the interviews covered the women's workforce histories, their experiences and views about working in Australia, and asked more detailed information about one job: usually, their current job or last job if they were not now working. Interviews were carried out mostly by bilingual interviewers, all women who had had considerable prior experience with and knowledge of gender and ethnic issues. The principal researcher and research officer also conducted interviews, with or without interpreters, as necessary. Lengthy debriefing sessions were held with the bilingual interviewers to ascertain their perceptions and feelings about the issues arising from their interviews. These, and group discussions within the research team, proved to be an invaluable part of the research strategy.

The results of the interviews were analysed using the SAS computer package; since the sample was not a statistically representative one the quantitative results should not be seen as applying to the population at large, but to our sample only. However, the women we interviewed were selected partly to investigate common problems and issues and only those considered fairly typical were interviewed.

1.3 The characteristics of the sample

We analysed interviews with ninety-four women, although lengthy discussions were held with over 110 women altogether. The number from each birthplace region/language group was:

Birthplace group	Number of women	Percentage %
Italy	20	21.3
Latin America (mainly Chile, also Peru, Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela, Columbia)	19	20.3
Middle East (mainly Lebanon, also Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait)	28	29.7
Indo-China (mainly Vietnam, also Cambodia).	27	28.7
Total	94	100.0

Although there were other important divisions within the sample, at the most basic level it could be seen as comprising two main groups of women. The Latin American, Vietnamese and Arabic-speaking women were all fairly recently arrived, young and most had one or more young children. The Italian women, on the other hand, were much older, had grown-up children, and most had arrived in Australia before 1969.

A quarter of the total sample had arrived since 1986; two-fifths had arrived since 1984; and two-thirds of the women had arrived in Australia since 1980.

Year of arrival	Number of women	Percentage %
Before 1960	4	4.3
1960-69	12	12.8
1970-79	17	18.1
1980-83	22	23.4
1984-85	15	16.0
Since 1986	24	25.5
Total	94	100.0

Most of the Vietnamese women were ethnic Vietnamese, whose first language was Vietnamese; a few spoke Chinese as well. All the Middle Eastern women except one Christian woman were Moslem; their first language was Arabic. The Latin Americans and the Italians, not surprisingly, spoke Spanish and Italian respectively as their first languages.

While the majority of the women (60) had lived in cities before emigrating to Australia, a significant proportion had come from towns (15) and small villages (19). The Latin American and Vietnamese women were by far the most urbanised groups, while the Italian and Middle Eastern women came mainly from villages and small towns. The respective proportions from each birthplace group are shown in the table below.

Birthplace	Residence before emigration village	town	city (%)
Italy	11	6	3 (15.0)
Middle East	8	3	17 (60.7)
Latin America	0	2	17 (89.5)
Vietnam	0	4	23 (85.2)
Total	19	15	60

Fifteen women were single at the time of the interview, having either never married or having been separated, widowed or divorced, while a large majority were married, mostly before coming to Australia.

Marital status	Number of women
Never married	12
Separated, widowed, divorced	3
Married overseas	50
Married in Australia	27
Living in de facto relationship	2
Total	94

While a quarter of the group had no children, nearly one-third had three or more. Two women had seven children each. Thirty-seven women had children of pre-school age - these were all newly arrived women.

Birthplace	Number of children 0	1	2	3	4 or more	Total
Italy	3	1	8	4	4	20
Middle East	3	3	11	4	7	28
Latin America	6	5	4	4	0	19
Vietnam	11	3	7	5	1	27
Total	23	12	30	17	12	94

At the time of our interview, twelve of the women were living on unemployment benefit or another form of social security payment. Of the rest, nearly half said that their own wage was their main source of income, while slightly more than half said that their partner's wage was their main source of support.

Although the occupations of the women at the time of the interview were extremely varied, it is possible to group them into certain categories. The following table lists a woman's current job or her last job if she was not employed at the time of the interview.

Type of occupation	Number of women
Machinist in clothing industry - indoor worker	15
Machinist in clothing industry - outworker	13
Process worker - electrical components	7
Process worker - other industries, including automotive components, surgical products, food processing and plastic products.	13
Quality control inspector	2
Packer/storewoman	12
Cleaner (house, contract cleaners, public sector, hotels)	12
Laundry/ironing assistant	2
Waitress/ kitchen hand	3
Community work in own ethnic community	7
Secretary or other white-collar	3
Own small business	2
Unemployed - never worked in Australia	3
Total	94

Approximately one third of the women did not have a paid job at the time of the interview. Fourteen of these women were unemployed and seeking work and twenty women had left the labour force, in most cases on a temporary basis. Another third were working full-time and the rest were working on a part-time and/or casual basis.

1.4 Interviewing as a research strategy

Interviewing women for our study was a valuable way of (i) collecting data about the experiences of NESB migrant women in the workforce and (ii) understanding their

perceptions of their situation, their views about work in Australia and their concerns. However, this technique also has certain limitations which should be noted and which affect the way our findings should be interpreted.

Firstly, the answers that people give to questions such as those we have posed are naturally shaped by a variety of social and cultural factors. As an Italian sociologist has written about interviewing in another context:

> ...We should not ignore the fact that the raw material of oral history consists not just of factual statements, but is pre-eminently an expression and representation of culture, and therefore includes not only literal narrations, but also the dimensions of memory, ideology and sub-conscious desires (Passerini 1979:84).

Mature women whose lives involve constant hard work in difficult circumstances, who have heavy responsibilities and who are typically relied on to cope and manage often have a fairly fatalistic attitude to their jobs (and their lives). Given their relative powerlessness to change or improve their work conditions, and their lack of access to and experience of more comfortable, easier and more rewarding jobs, we found that working class migrant women tended not, typically, to express profound dissatisfaction with their work or to have vehement criticisms of it. In some cases, this seemed to be because they enjoyed their work and the conditions were good; but often, expressed views that 'its o.k' or 'it's not too bad' should be understood as a reflection of the women's fatalism and their low expectations of paid work generally rather than as an objective assessment of the job itself. Thus, it was not surprising to find that the women who were most critical of their situation were those from better-educated, 'middle class' backgrounds, and those with qualifications and work experience in their own country.[2]

Another constraining factor that worked to produce uncomplaining responses is some women's unwillingness to admit to be continuing to do a job where they were treated badly or that was very heavy, hard or unpleasant. The Arabic-speaking bilingual interviewer, for example, interpreted some women's reserve in criticising their work as a reflection of the shame they would have felt in being known, in the Lebanese

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2 It is interesting to note that an earlier study on migrant women found that: "The majority of working women in the sample considered their job to be 'alright'" (Cox et al 1978:45). Like us, they interpreted this response as at least partly a reflection of the women's low expectations about work (4).

community, to be doing, and to continue to do, demeaning and insulting jobs. They felt that, if people knew how bad the work was, their esteem would be lowered in the Lebanese community. A further factor was that on the whole the women did not share the same interest in their work that we, as researchers, had. Many did not find anything interesting or worth talking about in their work experiences, seeing them simply as ordinary, boring and quickly to be forgotten at the end of the day. Hence the degree of expansiveness the women displayed varied considerably, and was not always as great as we could have wished.

That is not to say that most women who agreed to be interviewed were not extremely co-operative with our inquiry; we are extremely grateful to them for their assistance and patience.

CHAPTER TWO: THE LITERATURE ON MIGRANT WOMEN

2.1 Introduction

During the 1970s and 1980s, the broad outlines of a picture of migrant women workers' experiences were delineated in the Australian literature (see Martin 1984 and 1986). After describing this picture, this chapter will review the Australian literature on NESB migrant women workers in more detail, focusing particularly on research findings that refer to newly arrived women. International literature from high migration Western countries such as Britain and West Germany will also be examined to indicate issues and trends of relevance to Australia. Finally, census and labour force survey data will be used to examine the employment patterns of NESB migrant women. Their industrial and occupational profile is given, and more detailed information about the manufacturing sector which remains the most important site of incorporation into the labour force for newly arriving migrant women in Australia.

2.1.1 Migrant women as workers

Since 1945, the majority of non-English speaking background women who have migrated to Australia have come as dependents of men (wives, mothers and daughters). The labour force goals of Australian governments' immigration programs have typically been met by assisting the entry of males with appropriate capacities or skills; they continue to be the 'principal applicants', accompanied by their families (DEIR 1986:3). Migrant women have been considered more frequently in terms of the government's population-building goals (see Martin 1984:112) and ethnic affairs policies have rarely been oriented towards the needs of migrant women as workers.

However, historically, NESB migrant women, and in particular married and recently arrived migrant women, have been over-represented in the paid work force compared to their Anglo-Australian counterparts. Between 1970 and 1980 work force participation rates among newly arrived women ranged between 50 and 85 per cent compared with around 45 per cent for English speaking background women (Martin 1984:112). Higher rates of economic activity among immigrant women compared with the indigenous

population has been observed in other Western industrial countries. Although in Britain, for example, there is substantial variation among ethnic groups, most Black and Asian immigrants aged 25 years and over have higher rates of participation in the workforce, and particularly in full-time employment than white, indigenous women (Brown 1984). Often, migrant women from non-metropolitan areas are entering paid employment for the first time; and the reasons are primarily economic. The cost of establishing a home, family and life in a new country are high; two low or medium incomes are usually required to support a basic standard of living in host countries. Migrant women's husbands are more likely to be unemployed or employed in poorly paid jobs than the husbands of Anglophone women; and often migrant women are supporting relatives in their country of origin.

2.1.2 The jobs migrant women do

Because they lack the 'human capital' of marketable skills or qualifications, because of structural and attitudinal racism and sexism and because of the urgency of their financial needs, NESB women have historically been a cheap, flexible and dispensable source of labour in Australia. They have been concentrated in an extremely narrow range of poorly paid and low status occupations which typically involve repetitive, onerous and boring work with little job security and a high risk of occupational injury and disease. In 1981, 76 per cent of employed Yugoslav-born women, 73 per cent of Turkish women and 74 per cent of Vietnamese women worked in the trades or process work occupations compared to 36 per cent of the Australian-born population (VEAC 1988:6).

In addition, migrant women are located in a narrow range of industries, mainly in manufacturing. While also found in the wholesale and retail trades, and in finance, property and business services, they are under-represented there compared with other Australian women. Moreover, in manufacturing, migrant women tend to predominate in entire sections of the industry, accounting for 42 per cent of the female manufacturing workforce and up to 85 per cent in some areas such as clothing (Martin 1984:113). The clothing industry pays the lowest wages of any industry in Australia and is notorious for poor working conditions (O'Donnell 1984: 99); while it employs one-fifth of women who work in manufacturing, it employs nearly double that proportion of NESB migrant women working in manufacturing. Others are in the textile and footwear industries (like clothing, declining areas of the economy); food, beverages and tobacco; metal products; electronics and electrical components; plastics, rubber and paper products

industries. The latest statistical data from the 1986 Census will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.1.3 The decline of the manufacturing industry in Australia

Economic recession, international restructuring of the world economy and the micro-electronic revolution have combined to cause a major retraction in Australia's manufacturing industry over the last fifteen years. By the 1980s it was becoming increasingly recognised that migrants were bearing a disproportionate share of the burden arising from these changes. In the Kirby Report on labour market programs, for example, it was noted that:

> The greatest falls (in employment) have been concentrated in the processing and assembling sectors in manufacturing. This has important implications for the future employment opportunities of low-skilled people, particularly non-English speaking migrants (quoted in VEAC 1988:4).

2.1.4 The deregulation of employment relations

The other major trend affecting migrant women's paid work in the last ten years in Australia is the deregulation of sections of the labour force and the growth in people working outside the traditional jurisdiction of the centralised industrial relations and wage-fixing systems (TNC 1985). Again, these developments are part of an international tendency in developed industrial countries involving the introduction of greater 'flexibility' into the labour market and the transference of jobs to the unregulated and underground economy in order to survive the competition of imports from low-wage countries in the last decade (see, e.g. on the European clothing industry, Mitter 1986). A number of different trends affecting employment relations are at work. One is the growth in the non-award covered self-employment and sub-contracting, in areas such as the constriction and clothing industries where previously wage relations would have applied. A second is the growth of part-time and casual work where unionisation tends to be low and job security minimal. A recent study by the CMS (Castles, Morrissey and Pinkstone 1988) documents the extent of the decline in full-time male jobs in the manufacturing industry and the concomitant increase in the numbers of migrant women in part-time, casual jobs or classified as 'self-employed'.

A further phenomenon is the growth in illegal or 'black' employment forms used to minimise tax. This includes cash-in-hand work and the many areas outside traditional union jurisdiction where workers are formally covered by awards but receive sub-award

conditions and rates of pay, sometimes to supplement social security pensions or income from another job. The best-known example of this in the area of women's employment is the rise of outworking in the clothing industry, now estimated to involve as many women as are involved in factory-based production. Outwork will be further discussed below.

As migrant women, NESB women share the problems of other NESB migrants in Australia and experience the structural discrimination and exclusionary processes of their new society. With other working class women, they share a subordinate position in the paid work force, and shoulder the additional and often unrecognised load of unpaid work at home. However, the situation of migrant women is not simply equal to the sum of separate oppressions as is sometimes implied, but has its own specificity and dynamics. Australian literature on NESB women has increasingly helped constitute their experiences as an object of study in their own right.

2.2 *Australian literature*

2.2.1 The 'definers of public knowledge'

As Jean Martin has suggested (1978:203), the process of defining 'the migrant presence' in Australia occurred at the same time, historically, as the growth of feminism and strong, popular demands to examine and redefine women's roles in paid and unpaid work. Noting the fruitful consequences of these twin processes in producing some in-depth, high quality research on migrant women, she went so far as to comment that "this has led to the position where there is now more social knowledge about migrant women workers than about men" (Martin 1978:203).

While her conclusion is open to dispute, certainly if one considers quantitative analysis where immigrant workers are often still assumed to be male, it is true that the qualitative studies examining the experiences of migrant women as workers which appeared in the mid 1970s were not only path-breaking, but have been the major 'definers of public knowledge' (Martin 1978:26) about NESB migrant women in Australia since that time.

The first, **We cannot talk our rights**, was a large scale survey of Australian and overseas-born women based on a sample of households from two high migrant density Sydney LGAs (Cox, Jobson and Martin 1976). One thousand and twenty-four women from seven different language groups were interviewed about their work patterns, the extent of their training and work-related experience, and their family and household situations. The majority of the immigrant women had arrived in Australia in the last five years. The study found that, although two-thirds of the immigrant women had never worked in a paid job before coming to Australia, more than 50 per cent were in the workforce at the time of the interview, though many were unemployed. For these women, the trauma of immigrating to a new society was accompanied by the difficulties of combining paid work with their domestic responsibilities in a society that ignored the needs of working mothers. More than 80 per cent of the recently arrived women (in this case Arabic, Spanish, Yugoslav and Turkish) intended to enter the work force in the future, whether or not they were working now (56). The migrant women were concentrated in semi- or unskilled blue collar occupations, and the majority said that they would give up work were it not for the money (3). While Australian-born women sometimes made positive remarks about their work situation, the migrant women rarely did and their ."...perceptions of the jobs they were in were always related to their domestic situation" (3). Childcare was reported to be the major single problem facing working migrant women.

Extensive recommendations were made in relation to the provision of childcare, literacy and English language teaching for migrant women, education and retraining opportunities, union and local government activities, the establishment of craft cooperatives, and the encouragement of part-time work.

The second study, **But I wouldn't want my wife to work here**, focused more specifically on migrant women workers and in particular on those working in factories (Storer et al 1976). Conducted in 1975 in Melbourne, it was part of an action research project which aimed at the development of "strategies which would enable [migrant women workers] to organise and come together so that they *themselves* could articulate their situation, their grievances, their needs and requirements" (i). A survey of the views and needs of 710 women working in thirty factories was conducted, as well as extensive interviews with trade unions and management, and the report went much further than **We cannot talk our rights** in providing graphic descriptions of the uncomfortable, unhealthy and

unpleasant environments, regimented and inhuman work systems, appalling wages and conditions, racism, union neglect and employer abuse to which many migrant women factory workers were found to be subject.

In terms of newly arrived migrant women, the study found that the length of residence in Australia appeared to correlate with the types of industries where the women worked. More recent migrants from Yugoslavia, Turkey or South America were concentrated in the relatively more 'dirty' industries such as the meat and boot industries, cold storage and some food processing, compared to longer resident migrant women who worked in 'cleaner' clothing, food and electrical industries (108).

Its graphic account of shop-floor level class struggle and the report's conclusions that migrant women workers are like a "dormant volcano, likely to explode at some time in the future" (114) has had a substantial public impact in terms of exposing migrant women workers' oppression and defining their problems. A number of recommendations were made; many centred on the role of trade unions as well as making demands on governments and employers. The report was written from a perspective which viewed migrant women workers first and foremost as a super exploited section of the working class. Their oppression was seen as the result of the structural dynamics of capitalist society, and the conclusion drawn was that little could be done to improve substantially migrant women's situation without "massive reforms and changes in both the industrial field as well as in the wider Australian society" (117).

Rather than emerging from academic institutions, these seminal studies were both the product of women (and some men) working in community organisations; of people who knew or worked with migrant women in their everyday lives, albeit often in a community worker-client relationship. They are written in a style that is popular and eminently practical, and being reports, they contain only limited discussion of theoretical issues concerning migration, economic or gender relations. They are highly and unashamedly partisan and committed; written above all to prompt action to remedy the problems migrant women face. Perhaps one of the most striking characteristics of the Australian literature on migrant women through the 1970s and 1980s is that most new work has continued to take this form and indeed, to emanate from the community level. In addition to the studies on outwork to be discussed below, another example of the inventive research strategies such organisations adopt is a

phone-in on sexual harassment conducted among migrant women by the N.S.W. Ethnic Communities Council in 1981 (E.C.C. 1981). The phone-in evoked a good response from factory workers and cleaners who described the various types of sex-based harassment to which they were subject at work, but which, in a less anonymous situation, they would have felt scared to report for fear of losing their jobs.

2.2.2 Outworkers

While some of the community-based studies have followed the same track as the earlier 1970s research in further documenting the oppressive situation of migrant women factory workers (see e.g. Nord 1983), much of the more recent work has been concerned with supplementing this image with that of another: the immigrant woman manufacturing industry outworker, working in an highly exploitative situation, in her own home. While difficulties with documenting accurately the extent and nature of this type of decentralised production process remain, several studies have provided excellent accounts of the experiences of women, mainly migrants, working in this section of the underground economy (see, e.g. Flood et al 1982, TNC 1985, Cummings 1986, Centre for Working Women 1986, N.S.W. Department of Industrial Relations and Employment (hereafter D.I.R.E.) 1987, Tassie (forthcoming) 1990)[3] .

One of the most graphic and useful studies of this type is documented in a report called **Women outworkers** by the Centre for Working Women in Melbourne. Like **But I wouldn't want my wife to work here**, the research was part of an action research project which involved the Centre working with, counselling and organising outworkers around issues of concern to them. Two earlier studies by a trade union-based research organisation in Sydney (TNC 1985 and Cummings 1986) dealt with outwork as one of the growing number of employment practices which seek to defeat or undermine the operation of industrial awards and avoid other systems for regulating work. This perspective was retained in the Centre's study where the growth of outwork was situated in the economic context of declining profitability of the Australian manufacturing industry in the 1970s and 1980s. The view that outwork represents, to some extent, an answer to the

3 The ABS survey of home-based workers, carried out in 1989, found 3.4 per cent of the Australian workforce to be working from home. Of these, 70 per cent were females. Looking after children was the most important reason given for working at home. Immigrant women did not appear to be overrepresented in the ABS sample; however, it should be noted that the sample covered more employers and self-employed persons than employees and may not have been able accurately to tap the more informal sectors of home-based work where other studies indicate that migrant women are concentrated.

needs of working mothers was disputed. As well as outworkers who were young mothers with small children, many of the women who contacted the Centre for assistance were older women, retrenched or injured workers and also young girls who had not been able to get an 'in-door' job on leaving school (15). Moreover, childcare was found to be as big a problem for outworkers as for factory and other workers.

The Centre's work indicated that outwork should not be seen as a temporary resort of the newly arrived; outwork was common amongst both newly arrived and older established non-English speaking background groups, although the financial insecurity associated with it posed more extreme problems for recently arrived families whose financial commitments were heavy. In an earlier study, interviews were conducted with thirty-two clothing outworkers in the Illawarra; among those the average years of residence in Australia was seven and a half years - again indicating that outwork is common among both long-settled and newer migrants (Flood et al:18).

While most migrant women outworkers are concentrated in the clothing industry, and it has been the Clothing Union that has been most active in compaigning on their behalf (see Alcorso 1987, A.C.T.U. 1987) the belief that outworking is confined to a declining and decrepit industry must be modified in the light of some recent work. Outwork has been found to be common in a number of industries other than textiles and clothing: the Centre for Working Women found outwork to be widespread in the electrical, electronics and metal industries as well as in the packaging industry, in the food industries, as well as in the white-collar area (although the report is confined to manufacturing). While 35 per cent of the respondents to the N.S.W. D.I.R.E.'s. survey were machinists in the clothing industry, the 224 women in the sample ranged across twenty-seven different occupations (13). Similarly, a supplementary survey on home-based work carried out by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1989 found all industry areas (with the exception of transport, public administration and defence) to be well-represented (ABS 1989:6-7).

The literature indicates that all women working from home have trouble obtaining fair pay for their work and work under worse conditions than their workplace-based counterparts. The ABS survey found that of the women *employees* working from home (women comprised three-quarters of the total) only 46 per cent were covered by workers' compensation insurance and over two-thirds were not paid holiday or sick leave (ABS

1989:15). However, it is also apparent that, as Carol O'Donnell has said: "the labour market of outworkers is segmented, as is the traditional labour market, along ethnic and educational lines" (N.S.W. D.I.R.E.:v). The type of outwork done by migrant women appears to be the most onerous, oppressive and exploitative; one study reported that:

> almost without exception the (migrant) women presented their work as unrelieved, low paid drudgery which is often injurious to health, and involves long hours of work (ibid:37).

Another, reporting on the experiences of migrant women, found that:

> most outworkers, in practice, receive no holiday pay,.no long-service leave, no sick pay, no workers' compensation, and lower rates of pay than factory workers doing similar work (Centre for Working Women 1986:23).

2.2.3 The state and knowledge about migrant women

We have referred to the strength and vitality of community-based literature about migrant women and work in Australia, and the comparative dearth of research conducted out of academic institutions. A third key contributor to the production of knowledge in this field in Australia has been the state; its role in producing knowledge about and constructing definitions of migrants has been, in Australia, a particularly vigorous one. First, governments have been a primary source of funding for research about migrant women. Secondly, they have played a role in disseminating versions of the information produced by community-level primary research. Thus, for example, an internal paper by Women's Bureau in the Federal Department of Employment and Industrial Relations outlines the 'treble disadvantage' faced by migrant women and discusses "the employment of migrant women largely in jobs which are the most repetitive, most menial and the most poorly paid, and which have some of the worst working conditions which the labour market can offer" (Neari 1984:1). The ROMAMPAS review of government services and programs for migrants has a section on immigrant women which states:

> Immigrant women of NESB frequently experience a triple disadvantage as immigrants, as women, and because of low levels of English proficiency

and goes on to discuss their location in the workforce, unemployment rates, the problems of childcare and outwork (Jupp 1986:52-3). Other examples include reports by ethnic affairs units within State Governments (see e.g. S.A. Ethnic Affairs Commission 1984,

W.A. Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission 1988; a long list of such publications is included with some discussion in Eliadis et al 1988). While not taking us much further in understanding migrant women's work experiences, or in providing broader images of migrant women's work, the various reports and papers disseminated by the state play a useful role in disseminating knowledge about the problems migrant women face as workers and in maintaining some pressure within the state for the implementation of measures to overcome them.

Thirdly, the state has played a role in the production of knowledge about migrant women through providing forums for immigrant women themselves to articulate and debate their concerns. Among the most important of such assemblies have been a series of consultations held by the National Women's Advisory Council in 1978 (National Women's Advisory Council 1979), the National Conference on Immigrant Women's Issues held in 1985 (DIEA 1986) and a conference organised by FECCA on behalf of the Office of the Status of Women in 1986 (FECCA 1986). Non-governmental groups and organisations have also arranged meetings which have been an important means of drawing public attention to migrant women's issues (e.g. a national speakout on employment and health issues organised by the Australian Council of Churches in 1982 and the two conferences organised by the Italo-Australian Women's Association); often in these cases too, however, government assistance has been a condition of success. Another mode whereby, increasingly, migrant women's voices are being heard is that of television and radio broadcasting. Again, in this area it has been primarily the government-funded Special Broadcasting Service which, with series such as **Australian Mosaic** and the **Vox Populi**, has helped to put migrant women's issues on the national agenda. (In 1988, for example, the former included "Paying our dues", a program about the involvement, and barriers to the involvement, of migrant women workers in trade unions).

The impetus behind government-convened forums has been to overcome the historic invisibility of immigrant women's issues; in the words of one conference organiser to "draw attention to the many problems experienced by ... women whose voices are not often heard and who ... have little access to power and decision-making" (A.C.C. 1983:2). Typically, immigrant women have played the major role in organising such events. Thus, not surprisingly, a key demand to emerge from them has been for

participation in the decision-making processes of governments and for representation on government and semi-governmental bodies.

Rather than seeking to create 'new' knowledge the consultations are ways of pooling and integrating existing knowledge about migrant women, including, importantly, 'common sense' knowledge emerging from the women's everyday lives. The inclusion of the views and feelings of women 'from the floor' (i.e. from the audience) in the texts from such meetings gives them a fresh and powerful style notably absent from bureaucratic and much academic literature. An example is the comment of an interpreter participating in the first Italo-Australian women's conference:

> I was asked by a health professional why all those injured had names ending like mine and I answered that it was because people with names ending like his were not doing the jobs that people with names ending like mine were doing (85).

The focus of analysis characteristic of these consultations and speak-outs (one which differs from that in research discussed earlier) is to identify and address the *specific* and *additional* disadvantages suffered by migrant women in various areas of public and personal life (compared, explicitly or implicitly to other women and migrant men). However, the view that these disadvantages are in some way a result of the women's attributes (a view that will be further discussed below) is clearly rejected. Instead, disadvantages are seen to be the result basically of the failure of the state to respond adequately to migrant women's needs. The consultations tend to take the form of dialogues with the state (though clearly the parties have unequal power and the communication often becomes distorted); to a lesser extent, audiences of trade unions, the media and sometimes churches are addressed. There is a characteristic movement in these texts; from, on the one hand, descriptions of exploitation and oppression of migrant women workers by employers and managers within capitalist work relations to, on the other, demands made to the state to effect change. An example is the account "The boss is a like a dictator" in a 1983 Speakout where the speaker says:

> The boss behaves like a petty dictator. The worker only has the right to work. If she complains she gets the following answer, 'if you don't like it, go home'. And so the woman is continually humiliated and degraded...(1983:9)

The recommendations from this conference on work issues, however, are mainly demands for government inquiries, service provision and legislative change. The power

relations in the workplace disappear from the scene when it comes to developing a strategy for reform.

In terms of substantive reforms, work-related demands have been a major priority of migrant women's organisations. Two of the four areas given priority by the 1985 National Conference focused on issues relating to women's paid work:

> Improved, health safety and working conditions for the female immigrant work force (DIEA 1986:18);
>
> Improved access to language, education, training and retraining for immigrant women (ibid:22).

After reviewing the various papers, conferences, seminar proceedings, speak outs etc where migrant women have articulated their problems and needs, Eliadis *et al* compiled a list of those in the area of paid work:

> occupational health and safety, recognition of overseas qualifications, status and conditions of workers, training, career counselling, unions, workers' compensation, ESL on the job (11).

2.2.4 A more 'optimistic' picture?

All of the literature discussed so far emphasises the problems NESB immigrant women face, their disadvantaged position in the labour market and their generally oppressed condition in Australian society. There is a poignancy in the literature and the gap between the women's expectations for a better life, a future for their children, and in the case of refugees an escape from political persecution and turmoil, and the reality of their lives in Australia: "... the problems of language and underutilised work skills, the need to work .. and all the depression and loneliness of another country" are often described (DIEA 1987: 36). Initiatives such as on the job English classes, training and retraining courses for NESB women, work-based childcare and factory-based health projects have been established in response to the articulation and identification of these needs; although government action has been heavily criticised for being insufficient and inappropriate (see e.g. Eliadis *et. al* 1988: 23-5 *et passim*) such initiatives nevertheless provide certain opportunities for migrant women not in place at the time of the 1970s studies discussed at the beginning of the chapter.

The only literature which presents an alternative, and more optimistic, picture of the situation of immigrant women in Australia, and which inevitably indicates other policies, are certain empiricist studies using large scale, quantitative data analyses. Produced primarily by a group of researchers based at the Australian National University, but also used notably by the Stromback, from Curtin University of Technology, the approach relies on the statistical method of multi-variate standardisation applied to census and other data to 'control' for the influence of specific factors (e.g. years of schooling, possession of credentials) on the outcomes of different ethnic groups. As Castles has noted, "the answers of these researchers to the question of the specific problems of ethnic minorities in Australian society, is that there are no ethnic minorities and no specific problems" (1987:20-1). Much emphasis is placed in this literature on recency of arrival, making it of particular relevance to our review. The basic argument is that most migrants do as well as can be expected given their endowments; and that whatever 'problems' exist (e.g. high unemployment rates compared to native-born people with the same endowments) can be explained as a difficulty associated with settling in to a new country. Even when these problems persist for 'a large part of an immigrant's working life', they are still regarded as 'settlement' or at least 'immigrant' problems (Stromback 1988: 18).

These techniques have been applied to analysing immigrant women's situation by Mariah Evans, among others, most notably in an article in the international journal, **International Migration Review** (Evans 1984). Here, Evans concludes comfortably that:

> the Australian labour market appears to be nearly blind to ethnicity, except that Mediterranean women having little education get better jobs than their Australian peers... It is likely that the labour market treats everybody about equally. In most countries where there are legal restrictions on employment ... for immigrants, the potential for discrimination is much greater (1087).

Similarly, Ann Seitz, after comparing quantitative indicators of life outcomes of immigrant and native-born women in Australia argues that:

> the new 'trinity' of class, gender and ethnicity, often described as the triple disadvantage suffered by immigrant women, should not, perhaps, be accepted at face value (Seitz:15).

Seitz criticises researchers involved in the work we have discussed earlier (e.g. Storer and Hargreaves) as "tending to conform to and support the prevalent and pessimistic picture" (idem).

As with the work on immigrants generally by writers such as McAllister, Kelly, Stromback and Jones , the argument hinges on the fact that some groups of NESB migrant women have less 'human capital' - particularly years of education, qualifications and relevant work experience - and therefore cannot expect to do as well as their better-endowed sisters in the Australian labour market. As Evans puts it: "These differences in educational attainment imply very different work opportunities. For example, even if all else were equal, many fewer Mediterranean women would be 'eligible' for white collar jobs that depend on cognitive skills learned in school" (1984:1073). The problem is basically with the individuals, not with society. In fact, Australian society is seen as being more than fair to these newcomers; both Evans and Seitz emphasise the fact that "immigrant women ... are not necessarily financially in a worse position than comparative groups of Australian-born and British women" (Seitz 1986:15) and that some groups of NESB migrant women have a greater proportion registered in the census as 'self-employed' and 'employers' than do ESB women.

This type of argument has been extensively criticised on several grounds elsewhere (see, e.g. Castles 1987, Castles and Jakubowicz 1987). Firstly, the use of statistical data is completely uncritical and the data itself could often be interpreted another way. Evans' unquestioning portrayal of those in the 'self-employed' census category as 'entrepreneurs' despite the numerous accounts indicating the statistically ambiguous status of outworkers and others working in non-waged work relations (for example, independent contractors) and the consequent possibility of miscategorising such women is a case in point. Another example is her interpretation of the interesting finding from the 1981 census that while having children and a husband depresses labour force participation for most women it has little effect on the participation of Mediterranean and East European women (1074). Evans concludes that these groups' work patterns are therefore little affected by child-bearing (1074); ignoring the important findings of qualitative research that indeed it is precisely the need to enter the paid work force whilst in the child-bearing period of their lives that so constrains migrant women's choices. Secondly, this type of analysis takes no account of the structural barriers that many migrants face to obtaining reward for, let alone increasing, their 'human capital' in Australia. Many overseas qualifications are not recognised in Australia, particularly those from non-English speaking countries (see Castles et al 1989); many of migrants' skills and employment-relevant experience (especially those of women) are sought

after by employers but do not bring the bearer high pay or status. Moreover, as many studies have emphasised, mainstream educational and training opportunities are often either not accessible to, or not relevant to, migrant men and women in Australia (see e.g. S.A. Ethnic Affairs Commission 1986). Thirdly, as Castles and Jakubowicz have argued, the use of this method obscures more than it reveals:

> by holding specific group characteristics constant in the name of comparability ... the historical recruitment of migrant labour is made meaningless. The whole point about labour recruitment is that it does not lead to migrant populations similar to the host population (19).

Although not always articulated in theoretical language, the qualitative approach of studies such as **But I wouldn't want my wife to work here** offers a useful corrective to these quantitative studies. The former emphasise the nature of the social (in particular, work and family) relations which characterise migrant women's lives in Australia; relations which, in the case of work are, by and large, found to be oppressive. By contrast, Evans and Seitz analyse ethnicity as a set of empirical characteristics which *themselves* produce certain consequences. While the latter approach can be used to make optimistic conclusions (for example, that migrants' problems are simply settlement problems) it is not helpful in understanding or explaining the experiences of NESB migrants in Australia.

2.2.5 Other Australian literature concerning immigrant women

It has not been possible in this literature review to examine all the literature on immigrant women in Australia. Omitted from the discussion so far has been the body of material on issues of particular concern to migrant women workers such as occupational health and childcare. Studies on work injury and disease, workers' compensation and childcare needs may not have migrant women as their specific focus. However, they often contain considerable information about the work conditions, problems and experiences of such women; qualitative research in these areas has often yielded valuable information about the experiences of working migrant women (see e.g. Blackett-Smith and Rubinstein 1985 and Dawson et al 1983 on work injury and Brennan and O'Donnell 1986 on childcare).

In the ethnic affairs area, too, some non-gender specific studies have contributed to knowledge of migrant women's experiences (although until recently many did not examine the specificity of women's work). A recent study on migrant workers and

workers' compensation in N.S.W. found that migrant women from certain Mediterranean countries and the Middle East were even more over-represented among seriously work-injured compensation claimants than men from the same countries (Alcorso 1988:56). One of the very few Australian studies dealing specifically with recently arrived migrants is a study of the settlement of Central and South Americans who arrived in Sydney since 1981 (Morrissey 1987). In contrast with an earlier study of Spanish-speaking women in Melbourne (DIEA 1987), housing and employment were emphasised as the main problems facing new immigrants in Sydney. Lack of English language skills (the main problem identified in the Melbourne study) was seen as only one of the barriers to new Latin Americans' successful integration into the workforce. Of equal importance was the non-recognition of many of the immigrants' prior work experience, qualifications and training as both the men and the women in the sample were relatively well-educated and qualified compared to the Australian population (Morrissey 1987:47-8). The study also found that unemployment was an even greater problem for the women in the sample than for the men: the rates were 60 per cent and 35 per cent respectively. The women's desired labour force participation rate was very high at 90 per cent, confirming earlier findings of high participation among women in the years after arrival, despite concurrent family formation.

Finally, deserving of mention is the small but growing number of small-scale, ethnographic studies of women from individual ethnic communities DIEA 1987, Elley 1988). This type of study, while inevitably drawing attention towards the characteristics of the women and away from the larger social processes in which they are involved, has the potential to allow a more holistic treatment of women's experiences, including an understanding of their pre-migration lives, and of cultural and community factors affecting the women as well more general labour market factors. A particularly good example of this approach is the long-term work on Turkish immigrant women in Melbourne by Joy Elley (see Elley 1985 and 1988). She stresses the importance of understanding the subjective dimensions of migrant women's experiences. Advocating an ethno-specific, qualitative approach she argues that most literature "generally does not examine the relationship between work and the settlement process *as experienced by the migrant*" (1988:79 - my emphasis). She is critical of theories which see entry to the paid workforce as an emancipator of migrant women, having found in her own work that "entry to the workforce is only one of the many changes experienced by women who for the first time in their lives must live without the

support of an extended network of female kin and in a situation in which language barriers limit their opportunities of access to, and participation in, the life of the host society" (97).

2.3 International literature on minority women

The international literature on immigration, ethnic minorities and women is naturally quite extensive and it is not possible here to attempt to summarise or review it in any comprehensive manner. Rather, we will focus on some of the material from advanced capitalist countries of whose economies, like that of Australia, have relied on large scale labour migration in the post-war period: Britain, the U.S. and Western Europe. Because migration programs were ended in most European countries in 1974, the focus of such literature tends to be on ethnic minority rather than immigrant women.

While there probably is, in such countries, a vital body of literature and research produced by community-based workers and groups, there is also a more extensive and sophisticated academic literature on these issues than in Australia. Mirjana Morokvasic (1984) has presented a substantial review of this literature which focuses heavily on the labour force experience of migrant women.

The 'threefold and fourfold oppression' approach to analysing migrant women's situation is to be found in international as in Australian literature (see e.g. Phizacklea 1983: 26). However, in much of the literature, there is more attention given to the gender dimensions of migrant women's work experiences than one finds in the Australian material and perhaps partly because, as Morokvasic points out, the ideology of male support of women immigrants is made particularly concrete in the form of legal restrictions on 'dependents' right to work in many countries. She also notes, in this context, how the assumption that migrant women have come from countries where women have not been in the workforce and have been supported financially by men, is even more widespread: although, as in the case with Greek Cypriot immigrants to Britain (Josephides 1987) the reality is quite different. The point, indicating the dangers of generalising about women from a diversity of backgrounds is a caution of great relevance to the Australian experience.

Many of the themes Morokvasic highlights, and which are evident in the British literature on migrant women (Phizacklea 1983) run parallel to those in the Australian material discussed above. The use of migrant women to perform dirty, dangerous and unpleasant, work is documented and in particular their concentration in marginal, unregulated and super exploited occupations. Minority women in Western Europe, like those in Australia, are described as:

> a ready made labour supply which is, at once, the most vulnerable, the most flexible and at least initially the least demanding work force (886).

While their labour force participation rate varies across ethnic group it is usually higher than those of native-born women, and it is generally accepted that, as in Australia, official data heavily underestimates the participation rates of women working in the 'underground' economy (Phizacklea, seminar at Wollongong University, 1988).

However, as well as these parallels there are also some themes which emerge more strongly in the European literature or which are treated in a different manner. Three which should be noted here are:

- the role played by employment in advanced capitalist societies in changing patriarchal power structures;
- the role of the state in subordinating minority women within the labour force as well as in society generally;
- the role of minority women in the so-called 'ethnic economy'.

2.3.1 Changes in gender relations

Whether, and to what extent, migration represents a liberating process for minority women has been a matter of considerable debate in the international literature. Entry to paid work and access to contraception have been the two factors most commonly cited by authors in the late 1970s. Castles and Kosack for example, affirmed that "with the acquisition of some economic independence (migrant) women have a stronger position to demand emancipation from their traditional subordinate role" (1973:362).

The view that this is an inevitable or automatic trajectory has been subjected to considerable criticism (see e.g. Morokovasic 1983). Firstly the 'tradition-modernity' perspective often underlying such arguments has been criticised as presenting a stereotypical, static picture of sending societies: "migrant women (are seen as) *tabulae rasae* ..... and any difference from the stereotype is interpreted as a change towards the adoption of new models" (ibid:23). In particular, the implication that rural migrant women from less developed countries are generally oppressed and passive is seen to be an oversimplification. Instead, the strength, competence and dignity of many Mediterranean women in their own society is stressed, whereas in host countries "as 'accompanying wives' they may be more dependent on their husbands and either more overworked or more isolated than they would have been in their home country" (Myrdal 1984:998). These points, and in particular the difficulties migrant women experience due to a lack of supportive kin, are also made by Gill Bottomley in her discussion of Mediterranean women in Australia (1984).

More recent studies often still suggest that migrant women's paid work (and their subsequent potential for economic independence) and their greater economic contribution to the family's resources in their new societies are important in allowing them to question their domestic subordination as well to become organised and mobilised as workers. However, most writers are more cautious about overall effects of migration, and note how other factors (the oppressive nature of migrant women's work) counter-balance the emancipating effects, and how often at home little may change. Sallie Westwood found, in a study of (Indian) Gujarati women in Northern England that:

> a fiction was maintained that life continued as it would have done had the women in the household not been wage workers. In all cases the burden of work was not diminished in relation to the number of hours spent in the factory .. While factory work added immeasurably to the amount of work in their lives, most of the younger women guarded their right to work outside the home, for the sense of independence it gave them, the good friends they made, and the fun they had at work despite production targets. I am not, however, suggesting that factory work is in any simple sense a 'liberating' experience for Gujarati women (125).

2.3.2 The role of the state

As noted above, much Australian literature addresses the state in the sense of calling on governments to provide services and enact reforms that will ameliorate migrant women's experiences in the workforce. In recent years, the blindness of governments in

the 1950s and 60s to the needs and problems of migrant women in the workforce and their tendency to view migrant women primarily as wives and mothers, has been criticised (de Lepervanche 1989). Although there is evidence of a change in this outlook[4] the lack of provision of services for working migrant women remains an issue highlighted by NESB women's organisations, as noted above in Section 2.3.1.

However, in most Western European countries, the U.K. and the U.S.A., the state has played a more directly repressive role than it has in Australia in regulating and restricting migrant women's role in the work force. Phizacklea has documented how, in Britain, the ideological and misleading definition of women as potential or actual wives and mothers, economically dependent on men, is enshrined in immigration law and implemented through the administration of immigration rules (1986). Restrictions on minority women's rights to bring relatives to live with them in Britain and the effects of the work permit system in confining minority women to low paid, exploitative work are described. In the report of a study on the workday routines of Turkish women in West Germany, Munscher examines a panoply of ways in which the state intervenes in and controls the women's lives. Only a limited number of work permits are granted, forcing many women into exploitative illegal work. Restrictions on social security rights have the same effect. Moreover, permits can be arbitrarily withdrawn on the basis of the women having inadequate living quarters or unsuitable child care arrangements (1232), with the result that women live and work in constant insecurity and fear.

The politico-legal restrictions imposed on migrant women's rights as citizens and workers are an immediate concern of immigrant women in Europe and the U.S.A. which affects only a small minority of immigrants to Australia. However, the attention given to the state's repressive role by international writers highlights an area of relative silence in the Australian material. While the lack of, or inadequacy of, services such as childcare receives adequate documentation, the effects on migrant women of the operation of a social security system that, by and large, does not recognise a woman's right to work independent of her spouse and successive governments' connivance in

4 In 1986 the Commonwealth Government announced a seven-year program for the restructuring of the textile, clothing and footwear industries. One of its unique features was the provision of income support to all workers retrenched from the TCF industries as a result of tariff reductions, independent of their spouses' employment statuses or incomes.

accreditation and registration systems that effectively bar many overseas-qualified women from using their skills in the workforce have received little attention in the literature[5].

2.3.3 *The ethnic economy*

While some Australian writers have identified the high proportion of some groups of immigrant women appearing in census data as 'self-employed' and 'employers', and the over-representation of many migrant groups in small business (see e.g. Collins 1988:93), there has been little detailed attention to the extent or nature of involvement of migrant women in ethnic community business. Internationally, however, writers from both 'political economy' and 'ethnic business' schools have exposed the nature of 'family labour' in sustaining ethnic business (see e.g. Morokvasic et al 1987). 'Family labour' is seen to be, above all, women's labour and the situation of men and women in so-called 'family enterprises' is unequal. As Phizacklea points out:

> ethnic business is predominantly male-controlled and labour intensive; men are bosses and women are either workers or can expect to give orders only to other women (1987:22).

In her review of such enclaves (e.g. restaurant and fast-food outlets, clothing), she notes that while young men may also often be involved in the work, for periods of time, it is usually in an apprenticeship capacity - that is, training for future entrepreneurial activity. For minority women, on the other hand, involvement in ethnic enterprises is usually a dead-end; reinforcing their confinement to 'culturally safe' and often repressive social environments and usually resulting in little economic independence of their own. Studies of the clothing industry in particular, have emphasised, the role of patriarchal relations in recruiting and controlling low-paid outworkers (see Mitter 1986); Phizacklea goes further to argue that in fact access to a low wage, flexible female labour force - and therefore, immigration that has taken the form of complete family units - is a pre-requisite for successful ethnic business (1987:27).

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5 A package of new measures for skills recognition based on the assessment of competency rather than on paper qualifications was introduced by the Federal Government in 1989. The introduction of this new principle and the additional attention promised to vocational English training, bridging courses and advisory services all have potential to improve the recognition of migrant women's skills (Minister for Employment, Education and Training 1989). However, since most of the procedures for licensing and accreditation remain in the hands of State governments, professional associations and trades bodies, the scope for change as a result of the Commonwealth initiatives is limited.

Many of the same themes and concerns of Australian work on migrant women are found in international literature, reflecting the similar dynamics of post-war labour migration to many advanced industrial societies. However, in contrast to Australian material, international literature has a number of characteristics which result in a deeper and more comprehensive body of work overall:

- its more theoretical treatment of the subject, and in particular of the relationship between ethnicity, gender and class;
- the number of detailed case studies of particular communities and/or groups of workers;
- its attention to the social, cultural and economic context of women's migration and how this affects their experiences in their host countries;
- the variety of work situations of migrant women which are examined; for example, women's work in the 'ethnic economy' and in service sector jobs as well as in factories.

2.4 A statistical picture of NESB migrant women's work in Australia

2.4.1 Migrant women's employment status by industry and occupation

In the 1970s, Jock Collins argued that the Australian labour force was highly segmented, with NESB migrant women comprising the fourth segment 'at the bottom of the heap' (Collins 1984:12 and 1975). Labour force data from the 1980s that NESB women continue to be concentrated in a narrow range of occupations and industries, in jobs that are in general lower status, lower paid and less pleasant than those of ESB women. In broad occupational terms, NESB women's employment is in some ways more like that of NESB men than that of Australian-born women (i.e. the large numbers working as 'plant and machine operators' and 'labourers'). They share with Australian-born women a concentration in the clerical and sales areas, but compared with women as a whole are under-represented in these areas of white collar work. In other words, it can be seen from the tables below (taken from the August 1987 labour force survey) that NESB women occupy a distinct segment in Australian labour market.

Table 2.1: Occupation of workers by birthplace and sex (%)

Birthplace	Managers/ administrators	Professionals	Para-	Tradespersons Professionals
Women				
Australia	6.6	12.4	6.9	3.7
Overseas-born in ES country	6.6	13.1	8.1	2.9
Overseas-born in NES country	6.6	9.5	4.9	5.3
Men				
Overseas-born in NES country	12.1	10.9	4.1	28.1
Total employed l'force	11.2	12.3	6.2	15.9

Table 2.1: Occupation of workers by birthplace and sex (cont.)(%)

Birthplace	Clerks	Sales/ personal service workers	Plant / machine operators	Labourers	Total
Women					
Australia	33.4	23.3	2.1	11.	100.0
Overseas-born in ES country	32.4	20.4	2.2	14.6	100.0
Overseas-born in NES country	25.2	14.6	11.9	21.9	100.0
Men					
Overseas-born in NES country	5.0	5.8	13.3	20.7	100.0
Total employed l'force	17.2	13.9	7.9	15.4	100.0

Table 2.2: Employed workers, industry by birthplace and sex (%)

Birthplace	Agriculture/ fishing/mining	Manufacturing	Construct.	Wholesale/ retail trade
Women				
Australia	4.7	8.9	2.1	22.7
Overseas-born in ES country	2.8	10.3	2.6	20.3
Overseas-born in NES country	2.4	23.4	2.1	17.8
Men				
Overseas-born in NES country	3.8	31.6	12.7	16.5
Total employed l'force	7.1	16.3	6.9	19.9

Table 2.2: Employed workers, industry by birthplace and sex (cont) (%)

Birthplace	Transport/ Storage/ comm.	Finance/ property business service	Community services	Recreation/ personal	Total
Women					
Australia	3.6	13.0	29.6	10.3	100.0
Overseas-born in ES country	3.0	12.8	34.7	9.2	100.0
Overseas-born in NES country	4.5	11.6	24.4	9.1	100.0
Men					
Overseas-born in NES country	8.9	7.2	7.2	5.7	100.0
Total employed l'force	7.2	10.8	18.1	7.0	100.0

Source: ABS: Overseas-born Australians, 1988, Tables 4.11 and 4.12.

2.4.2 *The involvement in manufacturing of women arriving in Australia at different times*

The 1986 census shows that not only are NESB migrant women considerably over-represented in the manufacturing industry compared to Australian-born and other English-speaking background women, but that newly arrived NESB women are continuing to enter manufacturing industry jobs at a greater rate than those who have been settled here longer. The following table indicates the proportion of the female labour force of selected birthplace groups who worked in the manufacturing industry in 1986, and compares those who arrived in the last five years with those who have been here longer and with the total Australian female labour force.

The figures for the target groups of our study are shown. The table indicates the particularly high proportion of both newly arrived and longer settled Vietnamese women in manufacturing; the figures for the only comparable group, Turkish women, are also shown.

Table 2.3: Women workers in manufacturing

Birthplace	Proportion in manufacturing (%)		
	>5 yrs in Aust.	5 yrs + in Aust.	Total
Australia			8.1
United Kingdom	10.1	11.1	11.0
Italy	27.3	25.7	25.7
Latin America	27.3	20.9	21.6
Lebanon	24.4	18.2	18.4
Turkey	63.5	42.8	44.7
Vietnam	63.4	45.7	50.5
All women			10.2

However, although NESB migrant women have continued to be disproportionately represented in manufacturing, the decline of the manufacturing industry in Australia since the early 1970s has meant that this area has become a less abundant source of employment than it was in earlier years. The high migrant unemployment rates and the spread of manufacturing outwork in the 1980s are phenomena which need to be understood in this light.

Table 2.3: Newly arrived women in manufacturing

Per cent of female workforce in manufacturing: migrants in previous 5 years					
Selected birthplace groups	Census date	1971	1976	1981	1986
UK. and Eire		24.2	16.7	13.5	10.1
Italy		64.3	48.2	40.1	27.3
Yugoslavia		65.2	62.4	52.7	48.4
Total Europe		38.3	25.9	20.1	16.8
Lebanon		66.7	59.6	45.1	24.4
Turkey		74.5	76.1	67.2	63.5
Vietnam				66.0	63.4
Latin America				40.3	27.3
All immigrants		35.4	24.5	23.1	19.0

For immigrant women as a whole, and for most individual birthplace groups, the major shift away from manufacturing in the work pattern of new arrivals was in the early 1970s - i.e. between the 1971 and 1976 censuses, where the decline in the total female manufacturing workforce was nearly 11 per cent. This was the period when the long boom ended and the recession first hit in Australia.

However, for other groups there has been just as dramatic a decline in the proportion of new arrivals working in manufacturing during the early 1980s. For Italians, the decline between the 1981 and 1986 censuses was 12.8 per cent compared to a 16.1 per cent fall during the 1971-76 period. For the Lebanese the former was the major period of decline: the proportion of newly arrived Lebanese women going into manufacturing fell by 20.8 per cent between 1981 and 1986. Latin American women, too, experienced a major shift away from manufacturing of 13.0 per cent in this period.

Other groups of women again have shown consistently high rates of entry into manufacturing. For Turkish women, the relative decline in the number of new arrivals in manufacturing between 1971 and 1986 has only been 10.9 per cent, compared to around 40 per cent for Italians and Lebanese. There is still a high proportion of recently arrived Vietnamese women in manufacturing: 63.4 per cent and there has been only a slight decline between 1981 and 1986. However, the number of newly arrived migrant Turkish women in the workforce before the mid-70s was small and Vietnamese women are only listed as a discrete group in 1981. These migrant groups arrived in Australia after the recession had already hit.

These figures show how, during the 1970s and 1980s, the manufacturing industry in Australia became a less important source of employment for newly arriving NESB female migrants. They also indicate the diversity in the experiences of different birthplace groups and suggest that a variety of factors are involved and that there is a complex inter-relationship between them. Some of these factors may include:

- the class background and level of education of the arriving migrants;
- the type of manufacturing in which particular ethnic groups were concentrated during the period;
- the pattern of settlement of different groups of women in relation to spatial shifts in the manufacturing industry during the period;

- the degree of upward social mobility in different birthplace groups (in particular into the petite bourgeoisie).

Further quantitative and qualitative research could provide a more precise understanding of these issues.

2.4.3 Unemployment rates

ABS census and labour force survey data show the comparatively high rates of unemployment experienced by immigrant, and particularly, newly arrived and non-English speaking women in Australia. NESB women coming to Australia since 1981 have considerably higher unemployment rates, than those who came earlier, although their participation rate is similar to that of women who arrived in Australia between 1971 and 1980.

Table 2.4: Participation and unemployment rates of NESB immigrant women in Australia as of March 1987 by period of arrival

Women who arrived in Australia in the years:	No. in Labour force ('000)	Rate of force partic. rate (%)	unemployment (%)
1971 - 1976	127.9	48.8	6.7
1976 - 1980	148.2	58.4	9.8
1981 - 1987	115.0	57.3	22.6
Total	391.0		

The 1986 Census indicates that overseas-born women who had been in Australia less than five years and those not proficient in the English language had the highest rates of unemployment compared to other overseas-born women and men. The following table gives the rate of unemployment of overseas and Australian-born groups in the labour force

Table 2.5: Unemployment rates of men and women in 1986

Group in labour force	Unemployed as % of labour force	
	Women	Men
All in Australia	9.6	9.0
Overseas-born	11.2	9.9
Overseas-born who've been in Australia < 5 years	24.9	18.6
Overseas-born who speak another language at home & not proficient in English	26.5	21.1

(Source: ABS Census, 1986. Cat no. 2502.0).

2.4.4 Italian, Lebanese, Latin American and Vietnamese women in Australia.

The 1986 Census provides the most recent indication of the size of the Italian, Lebanese, Latin American and Vietnamese populations in Australia, and also shows the relative proportions of men and women in each community.

The populations born in Lebanon and the Central and South American region are the smallest of the four groups in our study, having 56,000 and 54,000 members in Australia respectively (DILGEA 1988). These are the tenth largest overseas born groups in Australia, each representing roughly 0.4 per cent of the Australian population[6] .

The Vietnamese community is larger; with 83,000 people it is the eighth largest overseas-born group representing 0.5 per cent of the population. Finally, the Italians, 1.7 per cent of the population, are the largest overseas-born group after the British, numbering, in 1986, 261,900.

Three of the groups in our study have a significant imbalance between the numbers of men and women settled in Australia. The proportions are indicated below:

6 The number of immigrants from the Middle East in Australia is much larger: 137,000 in 1986. However, since all but three of the Middle Eastern women in our sample were from Lebanon, it seemed more relevant here to focus on Lebanese immigration.

Table 2.6: Proportions of men and women in Australia; selected birthplace groups

	Number of women/ 1,000 men
Italians	851
Lebanese	883
Vietnamese	808

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 1986, Small Area Data.

Of the Latin American communities it is only possible to obtain separate figures for the Chilean population, where the numbers of men and women are roughly even.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has described current knowledge about NESB migrant women workers in Australia. The key studies on this topic in the 1970s and 1980s, which played the major role in producing and disseminating knowledge about migrant women in Australia, have been discussed. In addition, the role of governments in providing forums for migrant women to 'speak' and in disseminating information about the problems of migrant women workers has been described.

Issues of major concern to migrant women workers and to those in Australia writing about them have been noted. These include bad work conditions, the spread of outwork, the extent of work injury and unemployment. In contrast, the 'optimistic' view of migrant women's experiences taken by certain Australian writers is outlined and criticised.

In the third section of the chapter we explored, albeit briefly, recent international literature on minority women in Western industrial societies. Some of the similarities and differences between it and the Australian literature were noted; in particular, the greater attention in the former to the gender dimensions of migrant women's situation, the effect of politico-legal restrictions on migrant women and the incorporation of women into the so-called 'ethnic economy'.

Finally, we have included statistical material from ABS census and labour force surveys as another way of examining the participation of migrant women in the

economy. Data on the NESB women's employment status and unemployment rates were given, as well as additional information about the manufacturing industry which remains the main site of NESB women's incorporation into the Australian labour market. Population data were also included. We focused particularly on the groups which are the targets of our primary research in this study: newly arrived women and Italian, Latin American, Vietnamese and Middle Eastern women.

The patterns discernable in the quantitative data suggest that the employment experiences of migrant women are subject to a complex interplay of pre and post-migration factors. One of the most important is clearly the nature of the economy at the time when migrants arrive in Australia, and also the class and cultural background of the immigrants. Neither of these factors have received much attention in the Australian literature on migrant women, although the Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission has drawn attention to the first in their work on migrants in Victoria (VEAC 1985).

Very little of the literature discussed in this chapter has focused specifically on newly arrived migrant women in the workforce. Thus the empirical findings of our study (documented in the following sections of this report) should be of considerable interest to all those working in the field.

CHAPTER THREE: FINDINGS

3.1 Some women's work histories

Below are summaries of the life-stories of some of the women interviewed for this study. They have been chosen because they are typical and representative rather than because they illustrate any one particular point. Taken as a group, however, they suggest the similarities between the post-migration lives of immigrant women whose pre-migration lives in their own countries were quite diverse.

Case study one

Natalia migrated with her family to Australia in 1952; she is now fifty-two years old and has three children, two grown up. She came from a small northern Italian village, and while she never had a paid job before coming to Australia, she had the usual training of a young peasant girl in the 1950s; she was apprenticed to a village dress maker for three years, and had one year of training (unpaid) at a Singer sewing factory. On coming to Australia it was natural that she should seek work in the clothing industry, and she never had trouble finding work as a machinist in clothing factories where many women she knew also worked. Natalia worked in a pyjama factory until the birth of her first child in 1967; three years later, after her second child she began working in a shirt factory until 1976 when she had her third child. After that she decided to stay at home, and obtain sewing outwork through her cousin, which she continued to do till recently. Although, as she said, "il lavoro non piace mai" (work is never enjoyable!), she preferred the factory work to outwork: the former had better wages and conditions. Working as an outworker eight to ten hours a day, five days/week, usually brought around $200, though the amount, based on piece-rates varied; and she receives no sick pay, holiday pay or other award entitlements. Although she belongs to the clothing trade union, and receives union literature, she feels the union has little power to achieve much for clothing workers. If it was not for the money, Natalia is definite that she wouldn't have continued to work; her husband, a form-work carpenter, didn't like her to work either but agreed that they needed the money. Her main comment about her work as a machinist was that she found it very tiring; tiredness and the associated headaches are the reasons she finally gave up

working last year. Overall she feels that the pay has been poor for her years of effort, and thinks that, as an outworker, she should have at least received paid holidays.

Case study two

Rosa grew up as an orphan in a southern Italian village in the 1940s. After going to school until junior high school, she was apprenticed to a dressmaker: her sisters paid for her to be trained. When she was seventeen she emigrated to Australia to join a sister and her family, and married a few years after. Now she has five children, the eldest fourteen years old.

After arriving in Australia, Rosa took the first job she could get working as a factory hand in a clothing factory. However, she was being underpaid in that factory, she began looking for work elsewhere and eventually got a job in the clothing factory where her sister worked. She stayed there until she became pregnant with her second child; she then arranged with the factory to employ her as an outworker, and for eighteen years since then, Rosa has been working mostly at home. She has repetition strain injury from the work and has had two operations over the last fifteen years; she has never received workers' compensation. Although it suits her to work at home, she finds outwork tiring, boring and isolating; for a change, she began working casually in a clothing factory in 1987. However, conditions in the small factory were very bad; she 'worked like a slave' and was subject to the whims of a leading hand whom she thought was crazy. So after three months, Rosa decided to return to outwork - this time, sewing government uniforms.

Rosa said that she was not satisfied with her current domestic or working life - she would have liked to do the HSC and eventually to have gone to university. She comments: "Once I was clever, and I had a good brain - now, after years of sitting in front of a machine, it is not working well - I get confused." If it was not for the money, she would not want to work.

Case study three

Nejmeh is a thirty-five year old Lebanese woman who emigrated to Australia in 1987. She had worked for thirteen years as a primary school teacher in Beirut before coming; here, she has been working as a kitchen hand in a large fast-food outlet. Although she and her husband both began looking for work immediately after they arrived, it took

her five months to finally get her job with the help of a relative. After working there for three months, she was offered a place in a ten week full-time English course and left her job to take it; ideally she would like not to work and to concentrate on learning English. After the English course, she got her old job back and now earns $221 per week net. She works thirty hours and spends two hours/day travelling; she feels the pay is very low. While the working conditions are o.k., she has to take medication to stop the pain in her feet from constant standing; and knows that being a kitchen hand is not the sort of work she would like to do. Her husband, who had worked as a teacher for seventeen years in Lebanon, is now working as a cleaner; he works evening and night shifts so that they can share looking after their three children (the youngest of whom is three).

Nejmeh finds working in Australia pretty difficult compared to Lebanon and believes that the government should (a) provide more support for women in her situation and (b) provide courses to enable experienced overseas - trained teachers to work in their profession in Australia.

Case study four

Dina came to Australia from Lebanon in 1985, having worked in her home city of Tripoli for twenty-one years prior to coming. Although she had no formal qualifications, she had experience as a nurse, working for a newspaper and as secretary in Lebanon and having a job has been a very important part of her life. As a single woman, earning a wage has always been a material necessity.

She obtained her first job in Australia through a friend after seven months of searching: it was doing ironing in a clothing factory. Although she disliked the work, she stayed there for eighteen months until she was retrenched along with other workers. She obtained her second job through the C.E.S.; it was more enjoyable, working as a Council gardener, but as an employment scheme job, it lasted for only six months, after which she was unemployed again. Reluctantly, she applied for another job ironing in a clothing factory. It had been advertised in an Arabic newspaper. She found the conditions worse than in her first job; the pace of work was very fast and she was continually covered in hot steam. She earned $160 for a thirty-eight hour week and was supposed to iron 500 shirts per day. She began getting pains in her hands and when

she took three days off after three months of work, she was sacked. She believes that her employer suspected that she had tenosynovitis.

Dina tried to get another job, using every avenue and making frequent visits to the C.E.S. Eventually, the C.E.S. contacted her about a position as a trainee information officer working for a Lebanese community organisation. This was a temporary government-funded job: Dina has been unemployed again since it finished, four months ago. Despite approaching factories and regularly scanning the Arabic and English language press she has found it extremely hard to get a job in Australia.

Case study five

Nada grew up in Beirut (Lebanon) in the 1950s. She attended school for nine years, but never worked in a paid job as she married young and now has seven children (the youngest is four). She emigrated to Sydney with her family in 1987 and did not expect to work. However, once in Australia her husband planned to establish a clothing factory, and so they thought it would be a good idea for Nada to get some experience working in a clothing factory.

A relative arranged for Nada to begin working in a small Lebanese clothing factory where she was employed, and Nada began working there within one month of arriving in Australia. Her husband, who was unemployed, and relatives, looked after the children during the day; Nada did the family's domestic work in the evenings. At first, she found her job interesting and enjoyed having a break from the children. However, she quickly became very tired. After four months, it became clear that they would not have sufficient capital to set up an enterprise as they had hoped; exhausted, by this time, Nada stopped work. She says she does not want to work again, and could not stand working all day and then coming home to find 'everything waiting for her'.

Case study six

Lucy is a twenty-six year old Mexican woman who emigrated to Australia in 1987. She was a university student, and initially came to Australia as a tourist to visit her brother, not intending to work. However, she decided to stay and since 1986 has been trying to find a good job. While she was still an illegal immigrant, she found it particularly hard, commenting that "I was too scared to apply for regular jobs with good prospects: illegal immigrants do the most rejected jobs in society." So far, she has

worked for short periods of time in cafes, (as a waitress) in a hotel (as a housemaid) and as a packer in a clothing factory. In this factory, most workers were, like her, illegal immigrants; all were employed on a casual basis. She said that she felt that the employer preferred the Asian workers, who were not active in the union and were prepared to do unpaid overtime. She has disliked all her jobs so far - they were difficult, boring and unpleasant; however, she has been and still is willing to take any job at all.

Her English language is quite good as she learned English in Mexico, but she is frustrated at having little opportunity to improve it in Australia because of needing to work full-time. Summing up her experiences here, she has concluded that there are few prospects for most migrants in Australia and that women suffer the most.

Case study seven

Lien is a twenty-nine year old Vietnamese woman who came to Australia in 1982. She had completed high school and had begun a law degree at university in Saigon when she emigrated as a single woman to Australia. Although she had been hoping to continue her studies in Australia, the economic realities of life here and language difficulties meant that, after attending English classes for six months, she needed to get a job.

Her first job was a casual position as a process worker in an inner-city fast-food factory; a relative of her's was employed there at the time. After four months she was sacked, as the busy season was over. After inquiring at factories and asking people she knew, a friend told her of a job as a machine operator in a molded plastic goods factory. The job involved shift-work and working in an atmosphere polluted by chemical fumes; finding it extremely tiring and unpleasant, Lien looked around for another job while still working. After one year she found another job in a nearby textile factory. In this factory workers were underpaid: they often worked overtime (up to four hours a day) but received no penalty rates. Lien began again to job hunt, finally finding through a friend another factory job as a process worker in a surgical products company.

She finds the conditions of work in this (her current job) to be better than elsewhere and gets on well with the other workers. There is an active social life based on work friendships, with occasional parties and celebrations. She is now employed as a

quality control inspector, which gives her eye strain; she also suffers from repetition strain and backache, but has some good friends at the factory and feels that it is a well-run workplace. Although Australians get treated better than the migrant workers at the factory, she thinks it is understandable that newcomers should face discrimination; and she is pleased that, unlike at other workplaces, at this factory she is entitled to holiday and sick pay, long-service and maternity leave and superannuation. Like everyone in the factory she is a union member and says that the union seems to be interested in helping workers and listening to their ideas.

Lien enjoys working, and the improved economic situation she and her husband have since she has had a job (her current wage is $320 net for a 38 hour week). However, her husband does not approve of women being in the workforce; he thinks women should stay at home and take care of the household. Lien agrees, and feels that the traditionally smooth relationships between men and women are damaged by women having their own economic purchasing power and independence. While she feels she has gained a lot through working, she also feels that she has lost some of her husband's love. She wants to continue working, since they are now paying off a house and wish to have children, but would like to get a better (i.e. skilled or clerical) job.

Case study eight

Anh arrived in Australia in 1983 with her husband and child. She had previously been working as a primary school teacher for twelve years in Vietnam and expected to enter the workforce soon after her family's arrival in Australia. She found her first job easily through a friend: shift process work in a white goods factory. She stayed there only nine months, finding the work boring and difficult as the line moved very quickly; she now feels that she may have got tenosynovitis if she had stayed at the factory longer. As her husband had set up a small clothing factory, she began working with him. Within a year, the factory had gone bankrupt; in any case, Anh had a second baby and stopped working to look after the children. Her husband has been studying and is currently employed at a community centre as a book keeper; Anh has a third baby and is fully occupied doing housework and caring for the children. She has sole responsibility for domestic work since her husband is busy, studying and working; she feels she may one day go back to part-time work but does not think in terms of building a career in the area for which she was trained.

Case study nine

Kim is a Cambodian Chinese who came to Australia via Vietnam in 1983 at twenty-nine years of age. Having just finished high school, she had never had a paid job in Cambodia, but expected to work in Australia. Although she began looking for work straight away it took her six months to get a job, during which time she attended English classes. She was knocked back repeatedly by employers because her English was poor and she had no work experience: eventually her neighbour introduced her to the owner of a clothing factory who employed her as a machinist. She was not happy there, finding the work difficult and the other workers unfriendly; in particular she noted that Vietnamese-Chinese looked down on Chinese such as herself from other countries.

After being retrenched from the clothing factory, six months later, she looked for another job and eventually found one as a process worker in an automotive components factory. She works shift work on a production line, making car air-conditioners. Although the work itself is 'o.k.', she dislikes its boring and repetitious nature, and the fact that it leaves her no time to obtain further training or learn English. If she did not work overtime, her wage would be less than $250/week - insufficient to support her and to provide the money she sends back to Cambodia.

There is a wide variety of nationalities at her current workplace; and her experience is that racism and discrimination are widespread in Australian society. Outside work, hearing Ron Casey on the radio makes her angry and depressed. At work, the bosses and leading hand treat the 'white' Australian and European workers better than the Asians, and are unfriendly and unfair towards the latter. Moreover, male workers get higher wages for doing similar work to the women. She has never taken any action since she does not know if it is sufficiently serious to warrant contacting the Anti-Discrimination Board. Although union membership is automatic, she does not believe the union would help Asian workers, rather seeing it as being on the side of the white bosses. Kim had no experience of unions in Vietnam, but is extremely unimpressed by the way unions appear to operate in Australia.

She lives with her sister and sister's family in Australia, helping the former with housework, and if she could find a more interesting job she would like to continue working. She believes that it is good for women to be in the workforce, as they can

contribute economically to the family well-being and become more independent and confident themselves.

3.2 *Premigration training and work*

> Women always work. They are not in and out of economic activity, but at various stages of their life cycle they are either paid for their work or not and their work is either recognised as economic activity or not (Morokvasic 1984:888).

The amount and nature of the schooling, post-school training and work experience that the women had prior to emigrating to Australia showed considerable variation between language groups.

Very few of the Italian women, most of whom grew up in the 1940s, had more than five years of schooling. Typically, they had attended only primary school. The experiences of these women after they left school demonstrate how inappropriate is the equation between 'work' and 'paid employment' in examining women's work. Not only did most of the Italian women do large quantities of housework from a relatively early age, they also typically did unpaid work in the fields and sewing, working perhaps with their mother at home or with the village dressmaker. Yet very few of these women had ever had a paid job or worked for a wage.

Similarly, the traditional ways of classifying post-school training (trade, technical, professional etc.) clearly do not speak to the ways that many women learn vocationally relevant skills. A characteristic pattern, followed by many of the Italian peasant women in our sample, was being sent by their parents to work as an assistant to the village dressmaker or embroideress, or in some cases, to the village sewing school. These girls engaged in an apprenticeship, although they typically earned nothing during the period - in some cases, the family paid the dressmaker to take them on - and although they did not obtain formal qualifications or certificates recognising their skills or experience at the end of the training.

Thus, while very few of the Italian women in our sample had what would have been officially recognised as either 'employment' or 'qualifications' when they came to Australia, almost all had had several years training and experience doing sewing and in some cases agricultural work. It was interesting to note that the 1940s pattern described above, one identifiable as that of a developing country lacking a fully-fledged, large-scale industrial capitalist economy, was followed also by a younger Italian woman whose teenage years occurred in the 1960s. By contrast, as a group, the newly arrived women from other countries had more years of formal education and more institution-based, post-school training resulting in qualifications and credentials than the Italian women. The tables below indicate the comparative levels of education and the qualifications held by the women from the different birthplace groups.

Table 3.1: Years of education by birthplace

	Years of education			
Birthplace	0-1	2-5	6-10	11 or more
Italy	0	13	5	2 (10.0%)
Middle East	1	5	12	10 (35.7%)
Latin America	0	0	3	16 (84.2%)
Vietnam	0	1	5	21 (77.8%)
TOTAL	1	19	25	49 (52.1%)

Table 3.2: Type of post-school qualification by birthplace

	Type of qualification			
Birthplace	Degree		Diploma	Trade No quals
Italy	1	1	0	18 (90.0%)
Middle East	1	3	4	20 (71.5%)
Latin America	3	3	3	10 (52.6%)
Vietnam	5	7	0	15 (55.6%)
TOTAL	10	14	7	63 (67%)

As a group, the Italian women had the least amount of formal education; the Latin American and the Vietnamese women the most, and the Middle Eastern group came in between. Forty-seven (half) of the women interviewed in our study had never done paid work in their own country, and a further seven had not worked outside the home or

their family's business. Like the Italian women described above, many of the newly arrived women, on leaving school, had done only unpaid domestic work in their parents' and then in their own family's household. Fourteen of the women who had never done paid work had been students prior to coming to Australia. Only a third of the women (mainly Lebanese and Vietnamese) had had a paid job of the type characteristic of an advanced industrial economy such as Australia: that is, an industrial blue-collar job, a trade or professional job (such as hairdresser or teacher) or a clerical or other white-collar job (e.g. book keeper, typist, salesperson).

Approximately half the Middle Eastern women had completed only primary school or less (seven years); and around one-third had not engaged in paid work before coming to Australia. In contrast with the Italian women, these 'never-employed' women had typically been doing housework only, rather than unpaid sewing that was so common among the former. One Lebanese woman, for example, who grew up in a small coastal village, had her first child when she was eighteen and had five children by the time she emigrated to Australia in 1980.

Among the Middle Eastern women who had worked in paid employment before emigrating, teaching was the most common occupation; others included secretarial work, nursing, beauty culture, and two women had worked in their families' small businesses.

All of the Latin American women had completed primary school and had also completed, or nearly completed high school. Sixteen of the nineteen women interviewed had 11 or more years of schooling. Several had a university degree or had been studying at university before coming to Australia. Most had also had considerable experience in paid employment before emigrating: only four had not done any paid work (other than seasonal agricultural work). Many of the Latin American women had had professional or semi-professional occupations in their own country: personnel managers, teachers, industrial planners, book keepers and nurses; a few more traditional working class occupations were also represented in our sample, including factory workers and house maids. A larger group of women had worked as salespeople in their own or others' shops and small businesses.

As several of the Latin American women we interviewed were refugees, their post-school training and work experience had been considerably complicated by the political persecution to which they had been subjected. The university studies of one Chilean woman, for example, had been broken off as a result of imprisonment; following one year in jail, she had been under house arrest for a further five before making a sudden escape to Mexico and then Australia.

The Vietnamese women were, like the Latin American women, comparatively well-educated: 21/27 had had more than eleven years of schooling, and many had completed high school (twelve years). Despite this, only about half the group had paid work experience prior to emigrating. Nearly one-third (eight women) had been students and had never had a job in Vietnam; eight others had not sought work outside the home, in some cases because they came from relatively affluent backgrounds and their family had not needed to utilise their earning capacity. As with the other groups, teaching was the most common occupation among the Vietnamese women who had been in paid work before coming to Australia; most of the others had had professional jobs, including those of barrister and university lecturer; only one had had a blue-collar occupation (factory hand). Like the Latin American women, some of the Vietnamese women explained how political repression had interrupted their school and work experience in Vietnam; one teacher, for example, had been black-listed and had not been able to work for the last four years before coming to Australia in 1985.

3.3 Finding work in Australia

3.3.1 Planning to get a job in Australia

The majority of women we interviewed expected (and often wanted) to enter paid employment in Australia. Fifty-eight women said that they had expected to have to get a job in Australia compared with thirty-four who said that they had not. Despite their different work histories and levels of education prior to emigrating, there seemed to be few differences in the women's expectations prior to emigrating to Australia, either across time or country of origin.

Most of the Italian women had expected to get a job in Australia, as they knew that as much money as possible would be necessary to establish themselves in a new country and build a sound base for them and their children in the future. Similarly, most of the newly arrived women also expected to enter paid work in Australia; some because:

> as a human being, I like to work - it's important for the personality (Lebanese woman);

and others because they had urgent financial pressures to deal with. One Vietnamese woman explained:

> I escaped from Vietnam by myself and left my whole family behind...I am an eldest sister so I have much responsibility to support my family. I was willing to work as soon as I could in Australia.

Many other Vietnamese women echoed these sentiments; most needed to earn an income to support family members in Vietnam. Another reason to earn money was salient to a sizeable group of Vietnamese and Latin American women: in the absence of family or relatives in Australia, they had no option but to earn their own income. As one single Peruvian woman, who migrated to Australia with two children explained, she planned to work straight away after arrival:

> I needed to survive - I didn't have any other income.

Childcare was the most common reason given for not planning to enter the workforce among the women who had not expected to do so: many had small children, and planned to look after them at home on a full-time basis.

There were however, two differences between the aspirations of the Italian group and those of the more recently arrived women emerged in our study. First, the desire to learn English and/or to continue their studies before looking for a job was an aspiration expressed by several in the latter, but not the former group. As noted above, many Latin American and Vietnamese women had been students before emigrating to Australia; several of these women expected to continue their studies in Australia, rather than entering paid employment straight away. As we shall see, this aspiration was rarely realised. Secondly, a small number of the newly arrived women interviewed had entered on a tourist visa and did not have resident status. While, due to lack of other support structures, these women ended up having to seek employment, they usually had not planned to work in Australia.

3.3.2 *Entering and leaving the workforce*

As we saw above, while the majority of women had expected to enter the workforce after they arrived in Australia, a sizeable number (34) had expected not to.

Nevertheless, a third of the women we interviewed began looking for a job immediately after they arrived in Australia, many within the first week. Within three months fifty-one women had entered the workforce; the rest began looking for a job some time later. The main reason for most was economic - they and their family needed the money. The husbands or partners of the newly arrived women often had difficulty getting a job - their wives could not rely on their contribution to the family income, as had been the case before emigrating. So women who had never worked before outside the home (more than half of those interviewed) in Australia quickly entered the paid workforce, usually on a full-time basis. Reasons for not getting, or for postponing, paid work included lack of suitable childcare and the need to settle in - learning English rarely figured as a reason to put off getting a job.

Clearly there is a sizeable discrepancy between the expectations about their future lives that the women had before they came to Australia, and what they ended up doing after they arrived. While not all women entered the workforce immediately, all did sooner or later - more than half in a matter of weeks. (N.B. That is not to say all actually *found* a job so quickly - see below). Table 3.3 brings together, and shows the discrepancies between, the women's expectations about working in Australia and their entry into the workforce once in Australia. It also shows the proportion who had done paid work before emigrating.

Table 3.3: Pre-migration workforce experience, expectations about paid work and entering the workforce in Australia

	Number 'yes'	Number 'no'
Paid employment before migrating	47 (50%)	47 (50%)
Expected to enter workforce in Australia	60 (63%)	34 (37%)
Entered workforce within first 3 months in Australia	50 (53%)	44 (47%)
Entered workforce within first 12 months in Australia	94 (100%)	0 (0%)

That is not to say that the women entered the labour force on a permanent or continuous basis. At the time of the interview, nearly one-third of the women (28) were not in the labour force - that is, they were not in a paid job and were not looking for one. A further small group (9) were not in full-time work; others worked casually, variable hours, and six were unemployed. Only thirty-four women had a full-time job which they considered to be relatively permanent.

In most cases, the newly arrived women's departures from the labour force were temporary ones; usually in order to look after children. Two women had given up their jobs to study. (Two of the older, Italian women interviewed had given up doing paid work altogether- they described themselves as being too tired/old to work, rather than as being 'retired'). Thus, while at any particular moment, many women may not actually be working or looking for work, entry into the workforce, for most of the women we interviewed, was clearly a relatively permanent, or at least long-term, move. One Argentinian woman stopped working in disgust after doing factory process work for a year, saying she wanted never to have a job again:

it was like a nightmare.

However, while the majority of women changed jobs frequently, and moved in and out of the workforce to have children or to return, temporarily, to their country of origin, having a job after arriving in Australia was considered a relatively constant and inevitable feature of life.

3.3.3 How do migrant women find jobs in Australia?

Of particular interest to policy makers are the findings of this study on the means by which the newly arrived women found paid employment in Australia.

It seems that by far the most common means of finding a job was through the assistance of a friend or a relative in one's own ethnic community. Often, women had *sought* work using a variety of means - looking in newspapers, asking people they knew, using the Commonwealth Employment Service (henceforth C.E.S.) etc. What was interesting, however, was the means by which they had actually *found* their respective jobs. The majority of women found their first and second jobs through someone they knew, and a large proportion also found their third and fourth jobs this way. In the typical

situation a relative, or sometimes a friend, of the unemployed woman helped her obtain a job in the same workplace where the relative or friend was employed. This was true of the long settled women as well as of those newly arrived.

Many women said that their employers recruited by using the existing workers as contacts to recruit other women. Naturally this led to the recruitment of women from the same ethnic groups as the existing workforce, and some women mentioned that this was their employer's intention:

> My employer likes Asian workers because we are skillful, patient and we are hard workers. He does not like white workers (migrants and Australians) who do not do the job carefully and who are too casual at work (Vietnamese woman, electrical circuit board production).

An organiser from a trade union whose membership contained a large number of migrant women process workers recounted to us the story of an employer who, since the early 1980s, had deliberately recruited only Vietnamese women as process workers, believing them to be less 'stroppy' and harder workers than women from other ethnic groups. He had simply used informal networks that the women were part of in the Vietnamese community to ensure a constant supply of new women employees. However, in recent years, the Vietnamese women were becoming as involved in the union and as militant about their rights as any workers might be, and formed a strong cohesive work group, bonded by common language and culture. The employer now believed that his policy had backfired; having had little experience at recruiting except through using existing workers, he approached the union for help in finding employees from other ethnic groups to diversify his labour force!

As dramatic as was the success of these informal networks in finding work among both the newly arrived and the longer settled women, was the lack of success the women had in finding a job through the Commonwealth Employment Service. Less than 10 per cent of women found their first, second, third and fourth jobs through the C.E.S. In some cases women made derisive comments when asked whether the C.E.S. had helped them locate work: 'You've got to be joking!'; 'the what??' The jobs women did obtain through the C.E.S. were often short-term jobs, or training scheme positions such as a six month placement with a local Council or a C.E.P. (job creation scheme) job in an ethnic community organisation. According to some women, the only factories that used the C.E.S. to recruit employees were the notoriously bad ones who could not find workers in

other ways. They believed that good employers did not use, and did not need to use, the C.E.S.

While our discussions with the women were about the means by which a woman *found* work, and not to how often she *used* a particular service, there were several indications that the women's use of the C.E.S was itself limited by certain misapprehensions.

One view expressed by several women was that a woman could only use the C.E.S. if she was receiving unemployment benefits, and that the C.E.S. was mainly a service for men. In the instance of one Lebanese couple, the husband frequented the C.E.S. to seek work while his wife, unemployed for as long a period of time, had never used the service.

The proportion of women for whom a friend or relative was the means of finding work was highest for the first and second jobs, and fell slightly after that. (This was true of both the Italian and the other women; the main difference being the former's non-use of the C.E.S). It seems that, as a migrant woman stays in Australia longer, she begins to have more success in obtaining work through answering advertisements in newspapers (both the ethnic press and the English language papers). Outworkers often obtained work through this method, though in their case as in others, informal contacts were their most successful source of work.

The other most common means by which the women in our sample found a job was by simply approaching employers themselves and asking for work. Women (especially the Vietnamese and Latin American women) spent considerable time and energy going from factory-door to factory-door, often visiting the same one more than once over a three-month period. Between 15 and 20 per cent of women found their first, second, third and fourth jobs this way.

The other means by which a few women had obtained work successfully included:

- through a community worker, English teacher or officer at the migrant hostel;
- through their support group or family in the case of Community Refugee Support Scheme participants
- through their Church.

However, these means were only marginally important compared to the success of informal contacts, answering newspaper advertisements and directly approaching employers in leading the women to find work.

3.3.4 How hard is finding employment in Australia?

The considerable difficulty that recently arrived women have in finding paid work emerged as a major finding of our study. Virtually none of the Italian women reported any problems in getting a job in the 1960s or 1970s, although one commented that:

> language was a problem. Once language was under control it was easier.

In stark contrast, the more recently arrived women expressed considerable difficulty not only in getting the type of job that they wanted in Australia but in getting *any* job at all.

A Lebanese woman who did not have difficulty in finding her successive jobs as secretary in an Arabic printing shop, bus conductress, ethnic childcare worker and Arabic Saturday School teacher was very conscious of being an exception in her social environment (as well as in our study!) She explained it as being due to her trilingual (French, English and Arabic) education in Lebanon, her overseas qualifications and the number of courses and amount of study she had undertaken in Australia. From a relatively affluent Christian background, she had not had to work continuously in paid employment in Australia, but had had periods of studying English and undertaking additional training. Moreover, she had been able to pass the Department of Motor Transport's English test on the basis of the fluent written English skills she had prior to emigrating.

By contrast, most of the Latin American and Middle Eastern women had experienced long periods of unemployment in Australia and had found that a large amount of persistence and effort was required to get any job at all. The bilingual community workers who were contacted to obtain background for this study all identified unemployment as the major problem for newly arrived migrant women.

One woman searched for months till she found a job as a process worker in a plastic goods factory, only to be retrenched seven months later when the factory closed down.

When we interviewed her, she had been unemployed again for four months. She had never used the C.E.S. as she was not receiving unemployment benefits and believed the service was only open to men. A Chilean woman who had had several casual cleaning jobs concurrently, commented that:

> It's very difficult to get work - all my jobs have been through a friend; language is a big barrier.

Several of the Vietnamese women echoed the experiences of others that the C.E.S. was little help in job-hunting, and that if it was not possible to find a job except for through friends, one simply had to spend time contacting employers in order to get work.

> I could not get a job through C.E.S. or the newspapers - whenever I applied for a job which was advertised, it usually had gone before I came. I had to go to different factories to ask for a job - I had been to the McFactory factory many times before I was employed there.
>
> I had been to many jobs before I got one with X.Y.Z. During two months looking for employment, I collected the addresses of all the factories and went to every factory to ask for vacancies - I was offered the last one after applying for about twenty jobs (Vietnamese woman, quality control inspector).

While, as we have seen, obtaining work through the assistance of a friend or relative in their ethnic community is the most common means by which immigrant women find work, some women pointed out that it is not a wholly satisfactory manner. First, reliance on ethnic networks tended to channel women in a certain direction (e.g. cleaning) without their having the chance to look for something they really wanted to do; and secondly, some women resented the obligations they were under in cases where, for example, they were given a job in a brother's friend's firm. In such circumstances it was hard for a woman to complain about poor conditions or to leave a job.

While roughly one-third of the newly arrived women had experienced great difficulty in obtaining any job in Australia, another half felt that the problem lay only with getting a *good* job. The comment of one newly arrived woman summed up the views of many:

> It's not hard to get any job- it's hard to get the job you want.

Roughly half of the women we interviewed said they did not like their current job (or last job if they were not working at the time of the interview). As discussed below

(Section 3.4.2) disliking a job and finding (or seeking) a better one was one reason some women gave for leaving their jobs.

Our interviewers felt that the shame and embarrassment attached to the marked downward mobility experienced after emigrating to Australia was the reason that some women did not want to be interviewed. It was clear that many such women experienced the segmentation of the labour market as a constraining force; they felt that only certain jobs ('migrant jobs') were open to them in Australia. A Peruvian woman who had been trained as an accountant and a hairdresser in Peru and had worked for fifteen years as a shopkeeper before emigrating was working, reluctantly, as a house cleaner when we interviewed her. She commented:

> It is really difficult to find jobs, especially because of the language and lack of experience in other fields...some friends have told me that it is easier to find jobs in factories, but they have to work hard and for little money. It's hardest to find jobs in my area of previous training.

Most of the newly arrived women interviewed had experienced substantial downward social mobility since coming to Australia; this experience was reflected in the numerous comments that finding a 'good' job, a 'non-manual' job, a 'more interesting' job, a job 'in one's own field', a 'part-time' job, or a 'less tiring' job was extremely hard for migrant women.

3.4 Patterns of paid work in Australia

Often the most interesting and informative part of the interview from our point of view was when the respondent described and explained the path into and through paid employment that she had followed since arriving in Australia. What type of job she had obtained, how long she had stayed there, why she had left it and which job she liked best (or disliked least) were questions whose answers provided much insight into a working migrant's world.

3.4.1 Types of jobs and labour market segmentation

The jobs which the women in our survey reported on covered a wide variety of industries and occupations. The largest single category of jobs that the women had had

were home-based or factory jobs as process workers and machinists. The range of industries covered included: the clothing and textile industry, the meat industry, food processing, white goods, automotive components, electrical machinery and equipment, pharmaceutical products, fabricated metal products, and plastic packaging and other plastic products. A large proportion also had had, at one time or another, other 'blue collar' jobs in community services and the wholesale/retail trade as cleaners, nurses' aids, waitresses, kitchen hands, storewomen and packers, tea ladies and labourers. The small number of 'white collar' jobs held by the women in our sample were mainly jobs servicing their own community: teachers, childcare workers and community workers. Others worked as secretaries or in small business - usually their husband's shop.

While, as we discuss below (Section 3.4.2) there was considerable horizontal mobility of women between similar status jobs, there was much less vertical social mobility between different status jobs. The table below indicates the numbers of women doing indoor and outdoor process work, other 'blue-collar' jobs, 'white collar' and professional jobs for their first, second, third and fourth jobs.

Table 3.4: Proportion of women doing different types of work for their first and successive jobs

Type of job	Proportion of women (%) for first and successive jobs			
	First	Second	Third	Fourth
Factory process work	68.1	46.1	46.3	59.3
Outwork	5.5	13.8	22.0	3.7
Other blue collar	22.0	15.3	12.2	14.8
White collar	4.4	9.2	14.6	14.8
Small business	4.0	13.8	2.4	0.0
Professional	0.0	1.5	0.0	3.7
Student	0.0	4.6	0.0	0.0
Not known			2.4	
TOTAL (number of women)	100.0 (91)	100.0 (65)	100.0 (42)	100.0 (27)

Although in both cases, upward social mobility out of factory work was limited, there were differences between the Italian women and the newly arrived women in this respect. More of the latter had moved, or were considering to move, into white collar or professional jobs, than among the former, for whom the most significant form of job

mobility was movement between indoor and outdoor factory work. Moreover, some of the newly arrived groups had, or were planning to, study again, either to improve their English, and/or to gain the qualifications or training needed to do white-collar work. One woman had trained as an ethnic child care worker; one had enrolled in an interpreting/translating course, and one had completed a law degree in Australia that she had started in Chile before emigrating. None of the Italian women had made such transitions during their lives in Australia.

The work patterns of our respondents indicated that neither industries nor workplaces were rigidly segmented along single ethnic lines. Rather, as we will see below (Section 3.7) most women worked with other NESB migrant women in multiethnic workplaces. The most generalised industrial division was rather between factory process work (employing mainly migrant women from a variety of ethnic backgrounds) and white collar and service areas employing Australian-born and other English speaking women.

However, many women, as well as our interviewers, did note the concentration of women from certain ethnic groups in some industries and occupations. Latin American women were commonly found as contract cleaners in offices or domestic cleaners (indeed, one Chilean woman worked in a contract cleaning company where all the employees were South American). They were less frequently represented in manufacturing jobs, and were rarely reported to be in the clothing or electrical goods industry. The latter seemed particularly common among Vietnamese women, who reported working in this industry with Chinese, Italian, Filipino, East European and Australian women. Some felt that their small size and the dexterity they had acquired from doing craft work and embroidery in Vietnam made them particularly suited to this type of work. Italian women were reportedly heavily concentrated in agricultural work, in the clothing industry and in the public school sector of the cleaning industry. Migrant women from all ethnic backgrounds were reported to be concentrated in the clothing industry and most of the clothing outworkers had worked previously in multiethnic workplaces. Arabic-speaking women seemed more rare in either the cleaning or electrical goods industry; clearly many worked in the food and clothing industries. The other main areas where migrant women in our sample worked were in education and community services: in jobs as language teachers, teachers' aides, welfare workers, interpreters, childcare workers, where they were predominantly involved in servicing their own community.

More rigid than the segmentation of the workplaces along ethnic lines appeared to be workplace divisions along gender lines. Almost all the women worked in a predominantly female environment within the factory or other workplace, although the enterprise itself usually employed male workers in other sections or performing different tasks in the same section.

Typically, this was considered natural - men were seen to do different work because they were 'less quick with their fingers', or the work was 'women's work' However, several women had a more sanguine view of the sexual division of labour: one woman who worked for a contract cleaning company which employed only women said:

> they tell us that it's too hard and heavy - the men do not last for long.

Another, when asked if she worked alongside men in her factory, commented:

> no - men always have the better-paid jobs.

The main areas where the segregation of work along gender lines was not so marked were the cleaning industry and some areas of manufacturing: e.g. packing. In two cases, women clothing outworkers worked together with their husbands for the same middleman or factory; in one case, this caused many problems and tensions between the couple.

The woman (a Vietnamese woman) complained that her husband expected her to do all the housework and cook as well as sew; and she resented the fact that the middleman always negotiated with her husband rather than with her, and that she had little control over the income. This couple were in the process of giving up the outwork and seeking work outside the house.

3.4.2 Changing jobs

At the time of the interview, three of the women in our sample were unemployed and had never worked in Australia. Of the rest, most had had two or more jobs as the following table shows:

Table 3.5: Number of jobs held in Australia

Number of jobs in Australia	Number of women
None	3
1	22
2	27
3	15
4	27
Total	94

Typically, the women did not stay in the same job for long: 'long', in this context being more than twelve months.

Table 3.6: Proportion of women who worked in their first and successive jobs for different periods of time

Time worked in job	Proportion of women of those who had a first, second, third or fourth job (%)			
	First job	Second job	Third job	Fourth job
Under 3 months	17.5	9.2	2.4	3.7
3 months - 1 year	39.5	33.8	38.0	37.0
1 - 5 years	32.9	38.4	28.5	44.4
5 years or more	8.7	18.4	28.5	18.5
Unknown				2.4
Total number of women	91	65	42	27

As the table above shows, nearly one-fifth of the women who had had a paid job in Australia (16/91) left their first job within three months. More than half (52/91) had left within a year. Moreover, it seemed that the length of time women stayed in a job increased only marginally in their second, third or fourth jobs, refuting the hypothesis that the women moved in and out of jobs only at the initial stages of their work career, eventually settling down to a period of stability in a more permanent job or a job they liked. This was particularly true of the newly arrived women; the Italian women had records of staying in their jobs for much longer. There was a slight slow-down in the average rate of leaving jobs after the first one: fewer women left their second, third or fourth jobs within three months compared to the number who left their first job within three months. However, similar proportions left within the first year.

The reasons why the women left their jobs were varied and often complex. Usually, both 'push' and 'pull' factors were involved; the woman may have 'chosen' to leave, but in circumstances which themselves sharply limited her choices. Moreover, factors internal and external to the job itself were often involved, as the following comments demonstrate:

> I resigned from the factory after one month ... it was very unfair for new workers there; they had to work much harder than the old workers. The workplace was too far from my home and I enrolled in an English class, so I left the job (Vietnamese woman, talking about her job as a process worker).

> It was too hard, and it was too little money; now I am tired. I want to start my own business, in a different line... (Italian woman who worked as a clothing outworker between 1973 and 1988).

The three most frequently mentioned group of factors were the following workplace-related factors:

- bad working conditions, unpleasant work or low pay;
- being retrenched, in some cases where the woman had been employed on a temporary basis only, such as on a job creation scheme; and the family-related factor of:
- pregnancy, childbirth and /or the need to look after children.

A range of other factors were also commonly cited. Sexual harassment, work injury or disease and moving residence were factors leading women to resign. In other cases women were not retrenched but rather dismissed for reasons other than the shortage of work. Occasionally, women left one job in order to take up a better one. This occurred most among the newly arrived women who had just started paid employment in Australia - in 5/91 cases, women said that they had found another, better job whilst still doing their first one. Sometimes, the new job was involved a move into small business - working in their husband's or other relative's enterprise. In other cases it was to a more permanent job - many women were aware of the insecurity of their job contracts and knew that they could be dismissed at any time.

> My present job is quite good and I am happy to work there. However, it is temporary so it is not secure enough for us - my husband and I have bought a new house and we have to work hard to pay for it. Losing a job is very threatening - that's why I have to continue looking for a job that is permanent (Vietnamese woman, process worker in an electrical products factory).

However, the decision to take up a better job accounted for only a small proportion of the reasons why women left their jobs; more often, they left for the other reasons listed above; factors over which they had less control. This was particularly noticeable when women mentioned childcare; it was clear that in this area, the arrangements women had were highly dependent on the parts played by others:

> There was a lady, she was looking after my children, but at that time she left to go back to Lebanon; I had to stop working (Lebanese woman, talking about a process worker job she left after six months).
>
> I had to leave the job because my mother-in-law died; she had been looking after the kids (Italian woman, explaining why she left her first job - machinist in a clothing factory - after eleven years)[7] .

Thus we can say that, whilst these women's participation in the *workforce* was a fairly permanent part of their lives in Australia, whether or not they had a *job* at any one point in time was highly dependent on a number of factors beyond their need for money and their ability to find work. Variables such as the types of job available to them, and their reproductive role as well as the capacity of the support structures they had in Australia, affected the women's ability to do paid work and created relatively discontinuous employment patterns, especially among the newly arrived women.

3.4.3 *The need to work and the future*

Our study reinforced the findings of many other studies of working migrant women in establishing that their primary motivation to enter paid work was economic. Most women's families faced considerable financial pressures after arriving in Australia, and two incomes were clearly necessary to meet these. One Egyptian factory worker said that she was really tired and wished to just stay at home and that her husband concurred in this:

> but I can see that we need money and I have not any other choice than working outside.

Short-term pressures included cash associated with initial settlement, especially housing; most of the recently arrived women we interviewed lived in small rented flats, and only a small minority had been able to obtain a Housing Commission property. In

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7 The ability of husbands and fathers to care for children was rarely seen by the women as being of relevance to their participation in the labour force: childcare was clearly considered to be the mother's responsibility.

addition, some had loans to repay: the relatives of one couple, for example, had borrowed the money for the emigrants' airfares from a finance company and wished to be repaid as quickly as possible.

While the total number of women who said they would not do paid work if it was not for the money was relatively low, among certain groups the proportion was higher. While most of the Vietnamese women wanted a job for other than financial reasons (see below) a majority of Latin American and Arabic-speaking women said that if it were not for financial need they would rather not do paid work. Some were emphatic:

> never again! I only worked for one year, but I think I aged ten! (Chilean factory worker - food processing).

Many women referred to the difficulty of having to do two loads of labour - a paid job and domestic work.

> I'd prefer not to work and to stay at home. I don't like to work outside and come back home to find everything waiting for me. (Lebanese woman working as a machinist in a clothing factory. She had seven children).

Finally, the reason many of the Latin American women did not wish to have a job was to continue their studies. They would have preferred to have time to improve their English and go to university - in several cases their husbands or partners had managed to find time to study part-time while the women, due to child care responsibilities or for other reasons, had not.

However, while the *main* reason most women entered the workforce was clearly financial need, a significant number mentioned other factors which would motivate them to have a job in the absence of such a need. The Vietnamese women, in particular, emphasised the independence a separate income gave women within the family and the increased confidence that resulted.

> ... I am an out-going person. I feel better when I have a job (more confident and not dependent on my husband)...for me, a woman should have a bit of economic power within her family - if it is too hard for a young mother to work and do her housework, part-time work is best for her (Vietnamese factory worker).

Another common reason many women cited for working outside the home was the boredom of being at home all day. Outworkers felt this also - one Lebanese outworker

constantly invited friends around during the day, managing to combine sewing and socialising, in order to alleviate the boredom of being at home alone.

Finally, it is important to note that in many cases, the women who said that the only reason they stayed at their job was financial, also said that they would like to work if they could get a different job. Most commonly, women would have preferred to have a part-time job, as having a full-time job in conjunction with their household work and childcare was too tiring and difficult. Many of the newly arrived women emphasised that there should be more part-time work available, and again, the lesser compulsion to work full-time was seen as one of the attractions of casual cleaning jobs and outwork.

Other women wanted a job where their skills and abilities would be recognised, or in which they would have more control. The occupations such women typically aspired to (or at least dreamt about) were (for women who had a significant employment history pre-migration) the jobs for which they had been trained; something in the welfare field; or else small business.

> I'd like to have my own clothing factory... I'd like to be the manager...I know a lot about it, but my husband doesn't have the ambition for anything and he doesn't encourage me (Lebanese clothing outworker).

On the whole, the longer-settled Italian women were less positive about having a paid job than the recently arrived groups. This was because these women were at a different stage of their lives than the younger, newly arrived women. Many had been in the workforce for more than thirty years and were tired; they were sick of working and wanted to stay at home. However, the interesting point of similarity between their situation and that of the other women was how strongly they felt bound to work by economic necessity. Despite the Italian women's comparative financial security, their greater assets and the better employment situation of their husbands, they felt as compelled by economic need to do paid work as the recently arrived women who had few assets and whose husbands were often unemployed. There is clearly an important subjective dimension to perceptions of economic need, about which Chilean woman who had been in Australia for twelve years commented:

> when you first come here, you need the security of two incomes; friends also pressured me to work because we were so poor; then you develop debts and responsibilities - years later, you still end up needing to work for the money.

The experience of the Italian women, still typically working long hours of arduous labour after more than twenty years in Australia confirms the point made above (Section 3.3.2) that once the women entered the paid workforce they rarely retired from it altogether until they reached the end of their lives. Despite having often more than full-time work at home, the economic independence, material goods and psychological well-being associated with working outside the home continue to be most important to immigrant women in an advanced industrial society such as Australia.

3.5 Pay

At the time of our interviews (November 1988) average weekly earnings in Australia, after tax were: $357.75 ($484.50 gross). The average weekly female earnings were $324.35 ($427.20 gross). Most of the women in our sample earned considerably less than this. The net amounts women typically received for full-time work were between $200 and $260 for a 35-40 hour week. Some women (particularly Vietnamese women) earned more by getting bonus payments for quick work and by working overtime - in one case, a Vietnamese process worker who produced and checked electrical circuit boards in a large factory received nearly as much as her weekly wage ($260) again in bonus payments. However, in most cases, extra work brought the women between $300-$350/week net. Only eight out of ninety-one women earned average weekly earnings or more. About half the women were satisfied with their pay and half were not. Most women seemed to share a similar sense of what was considered 'good' and what was 'poor' pay: anything less than $250/week falling into the latter category. Some women expressed other reasons for being unhappy with their earnings:

- that the pay seemed little for long hours of hard work.
- that other workers in the factory received more for the same work (in one case, the employer's relatives)
- that it was not enough to meet living expenses:

> $220/week is not enough; I have to support my family in Vietnam and settle in a new country - I have to work in a second job on Saturday and Sunday to earn enough to live (Vietnamese woman, process worker).

While, for reasons mentioned above, the Vietnamese women tended to have slightly higher weekly earnings than the others, there was one group of workers in the sample whose earnings stood out as being markedly lower than those of the other women: the clothing outworkers.

Our study confirmed the findings of the many studies discussed in Chapter Two that indicated the extremely low (and certainly below award) wages received by outworkers. Most of the outworkers that we interviewed earned between $200 and $250/week. However, this usually represented payment on a piece basis for between 45 and 60 hours work. One Italian woman, for example, sewed 50 dozen collars for $250/week, which took her between 45 and 50 hours. Another sewed between 15 and 30 jackets a day, depending on their complexity, for an average figure of $215/week. An Arabic outworker received $2.50 for sewing each dress - the amount she earned per week varied considerably. A Vietnamese couple who worked together earned between $400-$500/week both working for six days.

3.6 Working conditions and the evaluation of jobs

3.6.1 Award conditions

For most women, the distinction between what pay and conditions they were entitled to under their award and what they in fact received was not a distinction salient to their experience. Women typically knew about what they received at a particular factory: they had only a hazy knowledge of conditions of which they had had no direct experience (such as long service or maternity leave). Entitlements at a particular workplace were evaluated (if at all) according to market criteria (what was paid elsewhere) rather than to legal standards (what was their right). Overall, a job was evaluated in terms of what the women got out of it (i.e. the pay) and according to how good was the work environment and how generous the conditions; but also in terms of whether it *suited* the woman in terms of such things as location, flexibility, hours of work and so on.

An example of this point is the case of some of the Italian clothing outworkers, who were relatively satisfied with their situation. Having worked in a factory most of

their lives, they enjoyed the sense of 'being in control' in their home (by which they meant being able to oversee their household affairs and take care of their domestic responsibilities) that outwork made possible. Compared to the outworkers among the newly arrived women, the Italian group were at a different stage of the life cycle and of the settlement process. Most of these women's children had grown up and had left home; and their husbands were usually securely employed, in reasonably well-paid tradesperson's jobs. So while many Italian outworkers had similar complaints as the others about outwork (the low pay, the insecurity and unreliability of the work and the income, the lack of standard award conditions such as holiday pay) they nevertheless felt that, as far as paid work went, outwork suited them better than factory work. The newly arrived women who were doing outwork in a different set of circumstances, and often with small children, experienced it differently.

While, as noted above, women sometimes changed jobs to obtain better pay or conditions, they often did not know what was the norm, for example, in relation to sick pay; and employers did not encourage them to gain a better overall picture of their wages and conditions packet by informing them about it. Rather, women obtained information piece-meal, from other workers or sometimes from supervisors. Although maternity leave is a subject of special relevance to these recently arrived women, many of whom combined participating in the workforce with family formation, few had been told, or knew, anything about it.

3.6.2 The working environment

One of the things women most disliked about their workplaces was that the working environment was often uncomfortable and unpleasant. Conversely, one of the most important reasons for liking a job was if it had a relatively good working environment. 'Good working conditions' was the most frequently mentioned response when the women were asked why they liked or why not they did not like their jobs (15 women gave this reply). As the comments below indicate, aspects of work environment that may seem relatively minor are in fact of critical importance to many working women.

> The conditions are not bad ... there is a big window in the office and another in the big room where the workers are; but we need more fresh air (Vietnamese machinist, clothing factory).

> It's very tiring, because I have to stand all day ... It's very wet in the bottle washing room; in the winter it was very cold. I used to get sick when I worked

there in winter. In the sealing section it was very hot (especially in the summer). The canteen was quite good (Vietnamese process worker, food industry).

The workplace is unsafe and very dirty...in the nine-month period that I've worked there, they only gave me 2 pairs of gloves - I had to buy what others I needed ... It was very heavy and difficult, especially when you had to carry the rubbish out ... Also I disliked having to work alone at night in a big building (Chilean office cleaner).

I liked my third job best, because I could sit down.
(Italian woman, discussing three process work jobs she had between 1961-71).

Women reported having to bring in their own toilet paper, fans and heaters and even being restricted in using electricity for the latter.

Because the women's work environment was often very poor, making work uncomfortable, unpleasant, difficult or unsafe, it was a major concern to the women, and one reason why working in their own or other people's homes (e.g. as outworkers or domestic cleaners) had its attractions.

On the whole, the recently arrived groups were more critical of their work conditions, and were more willing to criticise their employers than the Italian women. The latter's memory of work was that it was generally hard and tiring, but they often described the conditions as 'good' and believed that they had been treated relatively fairly by the bosses. The newly arrived women, on the other hand, were more angry about the conditions in which they were expected to work and had long lists of things that were wrong with their workplaces.

Whether poor work conditions are becoming more widespread in struggling industries such as clothing (where, for example, women complained that employers would not buy them a fan), or whether these different views reflect the women's different stages of life, backgrounds and expectations, must await further investigation.

What was clear, was that to many of the recently arrived women, the poor conditions they experienced working in paid employment were an unpleasant shock, as well as a persistent accompaniment of working in Australia.

3.6.3 Occupational health and work injuries

As will be apparent from Section 3.6.2, health-related issues and problems at work can not be separated from the general problem of poor working conditions. In many cases, the same factors that made working difficult and unpleasant also made it a risk to the women's health and general well-being. Not having chairs at work made people extremely tired from having to stand all day; cramped conditions and lack of fresh air caused women to breathe in more dust and lint in clothing factories and caused asthma; the lack of provision of protective clothing caused dermatitis and other allergies.

The great majority of the women in our survey said that their jobs had adversely affected their health. Indeed, only ten women out of the ninety-one women who had been in paid employment in Australia said that their health had not suffered as a result of working in Australia. The most commonly reported effects were muscular and back pain, repetition strain injury, eye strain, asthma and other breathing problems and generalised tiredness: many women suffered a combination of these health problems. One Latin American woman, who had worked for ten months as a laundry assistant in one of Sydney's top international hotels, explained that in her job she was supposed to wash 3,000 sheets each shift:

> I suffered R.S.I., tiredness and the effects of chemicals on my eyes: my supervisor advised me to wash them with a liquid to relieve the itching...

While 8/91 women reported having, or having had, repetition strain injury. Others believed that they were in danger of getting R.S.I. or other gradual onset injuries if they stayed in their current jobs.

> In my first job, (as a process worker in a brewery) I often got many cuts on my hands through working with the metal cans ... one of the workers was cut seriously in her leg ... My third job (doing touch up in an electrical products factory) could be harmful for my eyes in the long term ... (Vietnamese woman).

Bad eye strain appeared in fact to be very widespread among the Vietnamese women who did 'touch up' (inspecting and soldering small wires and components on electrical circuit boards). A small number of women also complained of sore feet and dermatitis; the latter was common among women who had worked as cleaners. Women had usually had experience of a variety of different work situations and had no trouble identifying factors such as the lack of job rotation or the detailed nature of the work which adversely affected their health.

Twenty-four women in the sample reported having had an accident at work or a discrete work injury which they identified separately to the general ill-effects on their health noted above. These included R.S.I., transport accidents on the way to work, a skin disease which resulted in the woman's nails coming off her hands, back injury, dermatitis (a meat industry worker) and lacerations (the women working in food preparation frequently suffered severe cuts when using the sharp knives).

Only eight women in total had received workers' compensation for their injuries. A few others said that they had been given sick leave, or that their doctors' bills had been paid. In most cases the women who had not been compensated for their injuries had not actually *sought* compensation, for a variety of reasons. Some of the outworkers and casuals did not believe that they were eligible for compensation; some workers (e.g. those working illegally or those receiving non-taxed, cash payments) were scared to claim. Others had been told that workers in their factories 'did not claim compensation' and were scared of being sacked if they did make a claim. Yet other women simply did not know about workers' compensation or had wrong information about it: some of the Arabic-speaking women, for example, believed it only applied to back injuries.

3.6.4 Factors affecting working conditions

As discussed above, the practical limitations on this study prevented us from making any systematic comparison of work conditions across industries or occupations. Nevertheless, from the women's comments, we were able to identify several factors which appear to affect the working conditions which working women experience. These are:

(i) Type of employment contract
(ii) Relationship between workers and employers
(iii) Factory size

(i) The single most important factor determining whether or not women received common award conditions such as sick pay, holiday and long service leave, maternity leave or superannuation was the type of employment relationship they were in. Although in N.S.W. clothing outworkers are deemed to be employees and in Australia

generally are entitled to the same wages and working conditions in almost all respects as 'in-door' workers, only one of the thirteen outworkers we interviewed in fact received these entitlements, and none were paid a standard hourly wage. (The exception was an Italian woman who worked for her husband's friend and did receive sick, holiday and long service leave and superannuation; she was, however, paid piece rates).

The other workers who, as a group, did not typically have working conditions most Australian workers expect were those working on a part-time or casual basis. Domestic house cleaners were the most obvious example of this group; although they were usually paid an hourly wage, none of those we interviewed received any other job benefits. Many women were or had been employed on a casual basis even though they worked full-time, regular hours. These included office cleaners, waitresses, factory workers and one woman who did door-to-door leafletting; they received nothing other than an hourly wage.

(ii) The relationship between the employers and the employees in a workplace, and to what extent workers were able to resist being unfairly treated by their employers was also a factor which some women saw as affecting their working conditions. The strength and unity of the workers as a group was seen to be important. As mentioned before, some women criticised workers from certain ethnic backgrounds for accepting too much and refusing to complain:

> This factory has mostly illegal migrants ... they prefer Asians, because they work long hours for the same pay...they accept the situation with silence. (Mexican woman - packer, clothing factory).

In other cases, it was reported that workers who had a special relationship with the employer - e.g. the latter's relative or friend - enjoyed better work conditions. Latin American women, in particular, expressed frustration at the refusal of other women in a workplace to stand up to their employers.

(iii) The working conditions are o.k, it's a big company...It's much better to work in a big factory where the working conditions are good enough to protect the worker. In the small factory, usually the workers are ripped off and the working conditions are often very poor (Vietnamese woman with experience of four factories in Australia).

Many women associated the quality of working life and the level of monetary benefits from work with the size of the factory. It was generally expected that in small workshops and enterprises workers received less pay and endured worse conditions. The size of the concern was obviously used to legitimise unfair practices on the part of the employer: women sometimes commented that the boss had refused to pay compensation because it was a small factory and he could not afford it.

(iv) Notably absent from the women's accounts of factors affecting working conditions was the level of union activity. One Vietnamese woman commented:

> We are not union members so the union can not protect us. Whenever we feel we are not able to work hard, we just have the supervisor to tell. There is no rotation of work and the working conditions are not safe enough to protect the health of the workers.

However, relating work conditions to the role of the union was not usually how the women saw things. Frequently, where conditions were considered to be 'good', women attributed this either to factory size or an idiosyncratic factor (e.g. the national origin of a foreign company) and rarely to the presence or absence of union organisation. While the latter may often have accompanied large workplace size, we shall see later that many women were critical of slow or inadequate union responses to issues, or had little awareness of their activity at all. Thus, even if union pressure had been, in some cases, responsible for 'good' conditions at a workplace, most workers did not perceive this to be the case.

3.7 Racism and other aspects of working life

3.7.1 Relationships with other workers

The majority experience for newly arrived migrant women was to be working in a workplace employing mainly NESB migrant workers, and to be working alongside migrant women from a number of different nationalities. Very few women worked in a 'mono-cultural' workplace: that is, where all workers were from the same ethnic or language group. In most cases, more than three other nationalities were represented. The women mentioned having women co-workers who were Italian, Greek, Vietnamese, Turkish, Maltese, Macedonian, Croatian, Filipino, Lebanese, Portuguese, Syrian,

African, Spanish and Australian; they often referred simply to them as 'Asian', Arabic or European women.[8] The main group among the women we interviewed who did *not* work in an environment of predominantly NESB migrant women were community services workers and teachers - although in most cases their clientele was drawn from their own ethnic group, their co-workers were not.

Most women we interviewed described their relationship with other workers as 'friendly' or else said that they had little contact with them. On the whole, women seemed to have low expectations of their work relationships; the interviewers noted the contrast between the women's animated and extensive discussions of their own families compared to the abbreviated and minimal nature of the comments about the women with whom they worked. When asked why they liked (or did not like) their job, the reply 'social contact' was rarely given.

In large workplaces where there were significant proportions of women from different nationalities, women tended to mix and socialise with those from their own language group.

> There was a group of Filipino women - we had little contact with them, they did not speak English and they talked in their own language among themselves.

However, while some women said that they had made good friends at work, the majority experience was that there was little opportunity during the day to do anything other than work. Many women in our sample were isolated from other workers by the structure of the industry in which they worked or their occupation: cleaners, outworkers and some of the quality inspectors and machine operators who worked alone. Others were isolated because they could not communicate readily with other workers; several women who had poor English found working to be a lonely experience.

Only a very small minority of women described relations among the workers at their workplace as unfriendly or hostile, though others had experienced situations which

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8 Several co-workers categorised their co-workers as 'Whites' or 'Asians' ('Whites' being all non-Asian, non-European workers). Non-Asian women did not use this distinction.

they described as racist. The Vietnamese women in the sample clearly had more such experiences, and cited incidents either involving themselves or co-workers.

> ... (a friend of mine) is a Chinese woman working in another section to me. There are twenty-three workers in that section and she is the only one Asian. Her English is very poor but she is a very good worker. She has been discriminated by other white workers who called her a 'black-haired person'. Her problem is she cannot express her ideas in English and sometimes she is misunderstood by people working with her. Due to the lack of language she was called a 'rude' person and other workers don't want to work with her. She feels very unhappy and always wants to leave the job (Vietnamese worker in pharmaceutical products factory).

In other cases, the nature of the payment system or pressure from supervisors caused conflicts over work performance which sometimes took the form of rivalry between ethnic groups:

> Workers were jealous of each other - hostile if you were faster than them (Italian machinist in clothing factory).

The bonus system was specifically blamed for generating competitiveness and hostility among workers. Women were very conscious of groups in the workforce being played off against one another and some were critical of those who they felt were prepared to work too hard or endure too much. One Lebanese clothing machinist, for example, complained about the Vietnamese workers in her factory and the way the boss responded to them:

> Our employer says 'I pay you to work, so you have to keep working, don't you stop for a minute' ... He likes Vietnamese because they don't ask for anything, they just work ...

Women also described racist attitudes that were not confined to direct work relations: anti-Asian graffiti on toilet walls, picking on a particular worker or group of workers from one ethnic group and reporting them to the supervisor for 'mistakes', being 'looked down on' etc.

Sixteen out of the seventy-four newly arrived women reported a personal experience of racism at work. (Although not questioned about this specifically, ten women also mentioned incidents of racism outside the workplace, in the street or whilst shopping). Moreover, at least one-third of the Vietnamese women had had some experience of racist attitudes or behaviour from workers. However, women generally felt that they were unusual incidents, or were due to the bad attitudes of individuals. On the whole,

work relations were reported to be good and the women did not consider racism on the part of co-workers to be a major problem.

It is also important to note that the incidents of racism that were reported involved European, Australian and other English speaking background people equally - the women did not see racism as an Anglo-Australian vs migrant issue, but either as a problem between ethnic groups, or, in the case of the Vietnamese women, between 'Whites' and 'Asians'.

3.7.2 *Relationships with bosses and supervisors*

If racism or discriminatory treatment among fellow workers was not considered by either the newly arrived or longer settled women workers in our sample to be a large-scale problem, racism was seen as a more significant aspect of the relationship between the women and those in a super ordinate relationship with them: employers, supervisors or leading hands. Many women in the recently arrived groups alluded to behaviour or situations which they considered to be racist: while both structural and attitudinal racism were described, the former seemed to be most common and was resented by many women. It took the form of migrant women (or some migrant women) being given harder, more unpleasant or lower paid jobs; and again, it was the Vietnamese women who had the most experience of this situation.

> Australian-born workers usually get higher positions because they have English language. My supervisor was not better than me, but he always wanted to boss me. He treats the Australian workers very well, but the Chinese and Vietnamese workers very badly ... The Asian workers work harder and get lower paid (Vietnamese women, textile factory).

> Australians are given easier houses to clean, closer to train lines, and also office work (Columbian woman cleaner).

A majority of the newly arrived women (35/74) thought that migrant women were treated differently to Australian women; although many did not know, having worked only with other migrants, or, in the case of outworkers, alone. In addition to the structural racism which relegated them to the worst jobs, some women from a variety of occupations had also experienced and were equally critical of the racist attitudes of employers, supervisors and leading hands.

> Sometimes they treat you as if you were a child - they make me feel as if I was a little girl (Peruvian woman working as a house cleaner).

Some behaviour that the women described as racist was often closely related to their position as bosses. Very few women had good comments to make about the way their employers or bosses treated them or other workers. It seemed that what some women described as 'classist' - i.e. rude, bossy, arrogant or harsh behaviour toward them as workers was, in many women's experiences, inextricably inter-twined to racist attitudes toward them as migrants (or Asians or non-Australians).

> Racist, aggressive, not polite, they are rude (in my factory, some bosses were Chilean and it applies to them as well (Chilean woman, plastics factory).

In few cases did women feel able to take any direct action over such incidents or behaviour. Frequently the racism was too diffuse. Structural racism was built into the structure of the workplace; racist attitudes were intermingled with people's personalities. In other cases, women did not know whether or not their experiences were serious enough to warrant taking to the Anti-Discrimination Board or a trade union. But in most cases women simply tried to ignore the problem and if it got too bad, they resigned.

> The only thing we can do to react to them is leaving the job (Vietnamese woman, process worker).

> I did not know how to report and had no ideas of getting help (Vietnamese woman, process worker).

In a few instances, women did make complaints about unfair treatment and occasionally reported successes. In one factory some Asian workers complained to the supervisor about being subject to constant harassment and racist comments by a Greek forelady. The forelady was warned by the supervisor and the employer and was eventually sent to a training course for foreladies.

In other instances women simply became angry and spoke out and then resigned. The worst case of racism that the women reported was in a small electrical factory. The Vietnamese women workers (who were one group in a multiethnic workforce) were upset about continuing racist comments by a supervisor and being pressured to do the most work in their section. In addition, the leading hand and the supervisor insisted on them speaking English: if the women spoke Chinese, they would say 'Australian please'. The final straw, however, was when a sign was erected in the toilets saying, in Vietnamese only: "Don't put your feet on the toilet!" The Vietnamese women were

furious, and one woman who had already resigned from the job, complained to the employer. She did not know what action resulted, but the factory was notorious as one of the worst places to work and apparently had an extremely high staff turn over.

3.7.3 *Sex-based harassment*

Sixteen of the ninety-four women interviewed reported having experienced sex-based harassment at the workplace. In most cases, the women referred to a personal incident; in a few cases, however, it was the general behaviour or attitudes of clients, co-workers or bosses that the women found to be degrading and offensive. Apart from cases where they resigned, in two other cases the women lost their jobs through the incident:

> the supervisors made sexual comments to me and I asked them to stop that, but they became very hostile with me and they pushed me to leave the factory and never come back to work (Lebanese woman, machinist in clothing factory).

Before proceeding to a more detailed account of the women's experiences, it is necessary to repeat the point made earlier about the nature of the information produced by a survey such as this one.

In Section 1.4, we referred to the difference between women's subjective perceptions of a situation or event and the event itself, taken as a whole. Because in the 1980s consciousness of gender issues generally, and of sex-based harassment in particular, has been considerably greater than it was in the 1960s, and because of the different political and socio-cultural backgrounds of the women interviewed, their responses about this topic (perhaps more than any other) should be understood as a reflection of their consciousness as much as an 'objective' account of what was taking place in their workplaces. Another factor to be taken into account here was the reluctance of some women to mention incidents of sex-based harassment because they felt it reflected badly on them. The Arabic-speaking interviewer, in particular, felt that the Middle Eastern women's shame was a factor which strongly affected the responses they gave.

None of the Italian women reported experiencing any form of sex-based harassment at work; one remembered an incident involving another woman who, she said, had made a fool of herself ('faceva la stupida'). In contrast, nine of the Latin American reported incidents of sex-based harassment ranging from:

> the boss making awful remarks about women's weights, shapes and so on (hotel cleaner)

and the boss's 'sexist, aggressive attitude towards women' (office cleaner) to cases where supervisors or employers pursued women in isolated circumstances and made advances to them. One Chilean cleaning woman described being repeatedly followed into the men's toilets by a group of male workers who then proceeded to embarrass her by using the urinal when she was about to clean it.

One Vietnamese woman working in an electrical components factory said that she did not like the way some men brought along 'sexy pictures' and hung them around the work place. Such views, absent in the discussions with the older-generation Italian women, would seem to indicate a greater awareness among more recently arrived women migrants about their rights as women and workers. They clearly considered behaviour by men which the Italian women would have considered 'natural' to be unacceptable and offensive .

Nevertheless, despite this, it was also clear from the women's comments that their ability to oppose or prevent behaviour they considered offensive to them as women was extremely limited and heavily circumscribed by the relationship of subordination between them as workers and their employer, on the one hand, and between them as women and male workers, on the other. Most women said how difficult it was for them as employees to complain about their boss's behaviour. They resorted instead to passive resistance: typically, leaving work or ignoring the person in question. Women described feeling pressured not to protest when they were sexually harassed by male co-workers and clients:

> the men working there used to make jokes about me ... I did not respond, I became very introspective (Argentinian woman, contract cleaner).

> clients sometimes came in drunk and said some words .. I felt disturbed, but I couldn't ask the client to go away, especially as it was my husband's business (Lebanese woman, working in take-away food bar).

One woman only (a railway cleaner) complained about the incident to her boss and to the trade union, and was successful in having the offending co-worker reprimanded. In two other cases the woman confronted the men themselves and told them to stop harassing them.

3.7.4 Trade unions

Approximately two-thirds of the women interviewed were trade union members at the time of the interview or (for those not in paid employment) had been in the past. Most women reported having had more contact with unions in Australia than in their country of origin. The extent of unionisation did not vary markedly between women from different ethnic backgrounds; as the women themselves explained, joining a trade union was less an act of will or a conscious decision, than something that happened (or did not happen) automatically in certain workplaces:

> yes, I am a member - they got our names at the factory (Lebanese woman, working in cake factory).
>
> yes - it is compulsory to join the union (Cambodian woman, working in pharmaceutical products factory).
>
> no - we do not have a union at the factory (Lebanese woman, clothing machinist).

The only women who joined a union independently were those who had a grievance or problem about which they had asked for the union's help. This was the case with a number of the clothing outworkers.

That is not to say that the women did not believe that they should be trade union members; on the contrary, many thought that all workers should belong to a trade union. This was particularly the case among the Middle Eastern and Latin American women, many of whom had had some involvement in the trade union and/or politics before coming to Australia. However, while the Vietnamese women appeared to have had little contact with unions in Vietnam, several held similar views to the other women about the importance of union membership. The experience that the older Italian women had had with unions had almost all been in Australia. They seemed, on the whole to have a more instrumental attitude than some of the newly arrived women; the comment that they did not belong to a union because they had never had a need was voiced frequently by the former group.

The generally positive attitude that many women appeared to hold towards trade unions *in general* contrasted sharply with their opinions about the effectiveness of their union *in particular*. The women who worked in organised workplaces had usually had some contact with the union delegates and/or organisers, had seen literature

around and were aware that union meetings took place. However, there was no sense that any of these women felt involved in their union; hardly any knew its name or saw it as an avenue of help with work-related problems.

Only twenty-six women thought that the union did a good job. A few were very positive:

> my union (the Federated Storemen and Packers' Union) is a very big one; it has been very well-organised and has worked very effectively to protect workers' rights (Vietnamese woman).

However, such views were scarce in our survey. The largest group (forty-one women) did not feel that they could express an opinion about the work of the trade union that covered their industry because the degree of contact that they had had been so small, and because the union's presence at their workplace had also clearly been minimal. The women who were not union members and who worked in unorganised workplaces, or in less regulated employment relations as outworkers or domestic cleaners, had typically had no contact with the union at all and knew nothing of its activities:

> considering that I've never heard of them, I would say that the union does a very bad job! (Chilean woman, contract cleaner).

Union members also criticised their unions for inactivity:

> my union does not do a good job: the union rep does nothing on our behalf; I've tried to contact them, left messages - there's been no answer, and now the boss calls me a communist (Chilean laundry assistant who had an on-going dispute with the management about being compelled to work overtime).

Twenty-four women felt strongly that their union did a bad job. While one Italian woman believed that 'unions cause trouble', most of the critical women felt that their union did not cause enough 'trouble':

> No - the union is not good; it is on the bosses' side (Lebanese clothing machinist).

> No - the union has not been any good at getting proper wages, holiday pay, sick pay, public holidays for outworkers (Italian clothing outworker).

One woman noted changes over time:

> it's better now than before - the union used to be on the side of the employer and the representatives used to protect their boss; now the union is representing the workers and is doing a good job for us (Vietnamese process worker, food factory).

3.7.5 Learning English

One of the noticeable differences between the longer settled group in our survey and the newly arrived women was the latter's greater prior knowledge of English and their greater participation in English language classes in Australia.

None of the Italian women had any English language skills before coming to Australia. Only five (one-quarter) of the Italian women had learnt English formally in Australia; this included a woman who had done only a correspondence course. Most said that they learnt English "slowly, slowly, just saying one word at a time" by talking with people at work and in the street, watching T.V. and listening to their children.

By contrast, seven of the more recently arrived women either could speak some English before arriving in Australia, or entered high school when they first arrived and learnt to speak fluently there. Forty-four of the newly arrived women (two-thirds of those with no prior English) attended, or were attending, English classes in Australia. Classes at the migrant hostel were commonly mentioned, particularly by the Latin American women, many of whom had come as refugees. Others had attended one or more courses at an A.M.E.S. migrant education centre, and/or perhaps some evening classes at a Technical College.

The greater participation in English classes of migrant women arriving recently compared to those who came two decades ago is positive, and was cited as an example of 'how much things have improved for migrants' by some of the Italian women. However, the *extent* of the newly arrived women's language learning and its effects in terms of their English language competence are questions to which our survey provided less encouraging answers.

Most of the newly arrived women whom we interviewed had attended English classes in the past, and were no longer doing so. Attending classes and doing paid work seemed to be for most mutually exclusive activities, so that once a woman found a job, she usually stopped going to English classes. As we have seen, the women tended to move in and out of the workforce a lot; however, one of the main reasons was to have, or to care for, children. In this situation also, it tended to be impractical for many women to attend English classes.

Yet although the women spoke as if their opportunities for learning English were all in the past, very few described their English language skills as 'good' or 'very good'; most were very uncertain still about using English and felt that their lack of fluency was a great hindrance to finding jobs.

The consensus seemed to be that the most important aspect of learning English was having contact with English speaking people and getting practice. One Chilean woman who had attended a course for two months in the migrant hostel explained that she had 'learnt more in the streets, talking to people and through T.V. and radio'. For some, such practice was gained at the workplace; but this depended entirely on the type of job that the woman had.

> Work doesn't help me learn English, because we work on our own, we don't have time to talk (Argentinian woman, office cleaner).
>
> Well, it's good to practice English with people at work, but I work mainly with Italians (Italian woman, clothing machinist).
>
> I have learnt a lot of English through work - people correct me a lot, and I am allowed time to attend classes (Chilean woman, working as a secretary in a government office).
>
> I think that if you had a reasonable job, it would help you learn English (Chilean woman, office cleaner).

The extent to which the women learnt English in Australia seemed to be closely linked to the type of work that they did; doing outwork, cleaning or working as a process worker in noisy factories with other migrant women were typically not conducive to the women improving their English beyond a very basic level.

3.7.6 Travelling from home to work

The most common means by which the women travelled to work was public transport. Approximately two-thirds of the women who worked outside their home travelled to work by train and (usually) bus; and for many, it was a long journey. At least ten women reported travelling two hours each way to work; childcare arrangements had to be made taking this long working day into account.

A smaller number of women commuted by car - either their own, their husband's or a friend. Since, as we have noted above, the women often found work at a friend's workplace, shared travel arrangements were often possible.

It seemed that, on the whole, the newly arrived women in the sample travelled longer distances than the Italian women did or had when they first came to Australia. The latter mostly lived in the inner western suburbs and had typically commuted to clothing factories in the inner city; while, many of the newly arrived women that we interviewed lived in Sydney's far-flung western suburbs and commuted to manufacturing jobs throughout the city's different regions. Very few women (5) walked the whole way to work (although of course many walked considerable distances between railway stations and their workplaces).

Although many women travelled substantial distances, and nearly half the sample said that getting to work was a problem for them, very few women restricted their job hunting to accessible locations. Rather, it seemed that women were prepared to go virtually anywhere for a job. Convenience seemed to be a factor taken into account where the women had a *choice* of jobs - perhaps if searching for a new job from the relative security of their existing workplace. However they were not always successful:

> It took me 20 minutes to walk from my place to the station and 15 minutes from the station to the factory, so I had to walk at least 1 hour every day. But I had no choice at the time - I was not able to get another job (Vietnamese woman discussing her job in a clothing factory where she worked for 18 months before leaving to have children).

3.8 Households, husbands and domestic work

3.8.1 Living arrangements

As noted in Chapter One, more than three-quarters (77/91) of the women interviewed were married or in a de facto relationship at the time of the interview, most having married overseas and having come to Australia with their husbands[9].

9 For the sake of convenience, the term 'husband' will be used to refer to the women's male partners, whether a couple is married or not.

The most common household situation was the nuclear family: sixty-seven women lived with their husbands and one or more children. Women who did not have children lived either alone (9) or with other family members such as sisters or parents (12). Living with a husband or partner seemed usually to involve having children, as very few women (6) lived with a spouse only, *without* children. Thus, for most women, entering into marriage also involved establishing their own household and becoming mothers; three processes that in many pre-industrial or rural societies are separate in time and space.

3.8.2 Husbands' jobs

As a group the women's partners had similar types of occupations as did the women, although there was no clear identity between the occupations of the two partners in a couple. Twelve of the husbands were unemployed at the time of the interview compared to fourteen of the women; in contrast, however, only one spouse (a student) was reported not to be in the labour force. While many of the women (20) were not working for reasons other than unemployment at the time of the interview, the men were almost all either working or unemployed. This indicates the way in which the factors such as the need to look after children impinged on the women's lives, affecting their ability to get paid jobs, in a way that they did not impinge on the employment capacities of the women's husbands (see Section 3.3.2). While mothers had often dropped out of the workforce for reasons related to their children, no cases were cited where fathers had.

The greater difficulty of the newly arrived women in finding a job, and their much more common experience of unemployment compared to the older-settled Italian women, were also features of the experiences of the women's husbands. The unemployed men were all the husbands of the newly arrived women; suggesting that the consequences of unemployment fall particularly heavily on the households of newly arrived immigrants.

The employed men had similar types of occupations as the women, although a greater proportion were self-employed or small business people (5/77 men compared to 2/91 women) and two men were working as professionals in Australia compared to none of the women in our sample. The majority of the husbands, however, had factory process

work or other blue-collar jobs such as labouring. None except the semi-skilled Italian form-work carpenters were working as tradesmen at the time of the interview.

3.8.3 Domestic work

The responses women gave to questions about housework and domestic responsibilities suggested that there is not much difference between the roles of the older, long-settled women and the younger women who have arrived more recently. In the majority of cases, among both groups, the women had major responsibility for house and children and did most of the domestic work. Because their children had mostly grown up, or were teenagers, the Italian women typically had lighter work loads than the other women who often had young children. The following comments reflect the domestic division of labour, and the justifications for it, common among both groups:

> I do most of the housework... My husband doesn't help; he works very hard, so he only relaxes at home. My children are all students and so they are all busy studying... I do the looking after of them - my parents are too old (Vietnamese women in a household which comprised her husband, four children of 16, 14,13 and 10 years and her parents. She had a casual cleaning job and usually worked about 20 hours/week).
>
> I do most of the work; if my husband helps it is only occasional (Peruvian woman, currently not working due to pregnancy, living with two small daughters and her unemployed husband).
>
> My husband is doing some study at the college so he is too busy to help me. My parents do (Cambodian women living with her husband, their two small children, her parents, two brothers and sister-in-laws).
>
> My husband and I do the shopping, I do the cooking and the cleaning ... It is hard; I cook nearly every evening and clean at the weekends (Lebanese woman living with husband and three small children; both husband and wife worked full time).

The task performed most commonly by husbands was shopping; men were, it seems, far more eager to shop than they were to clean or cook.

3.8.4 Working: the effect on relationships

The women who did paid work as well as most of the domestic labour were, not surprisingly, those who experienced most difficulties in coping and frequently reported being exhausted and wishing to give up their job or go part time. A Chilean woman who had given up her paid job described the situation when both she and her husband were working as 'chaotic' and clearly resented the fact that her husband had "expected me

to produce and to look after the house as well". She said that the pressure they had been under damaged their relationship so much that they nearly separated, but that things had been much better since she gave up her job.

In fact, twenty-three women said that when they started doing paid work their relationship with their husband changed for the worse, compared with only six who said that it changed for the better. (Most said that they noticed little change). Sometimes, it was simply the pressures of too much work, tiredness and lack of time, as identified by the Chilean women reported above and in the following comments:

> Yes, our relationship has been affected a bit - sometimes I can't see my husband for three days because I work in the morning and he works in the afternoon and comes home late, sometimes at 12.00 p.m. (Lebanese woman).
>
> Now we're both very exhausted and very busy ... We bought a house a few years ago and both of us have to work hard to pay for it - we have no time to enjoy our life and our relationship has also changed a lot (Vietnamese woman).
>
> I feel nervous all the time (Chilean woman, working full time with small children).

But the women's entry into paid employment sometimes led them to become more independent and assertive and this was also reported to adversely affect their relationships with their husbands:

> My relationship has changed - when the woman works she feels some independence and I have a lot of conflict with my husband (Lebanese woman who had had four factory jobs since coming to Australia in 1980).

Another thirty-year old Lebanese woman described the massive changes in her personality and outlook on life since emigrating to Australia. As the ninth-born in her family, she said that she had always been 'treated like a child'; in Lebanon, the only work she had done was unpaid work in her parents' petrol station. On coming to Australia in 1981, she began working as a cleaner in the railways and then got a job as a data-entry operator there. She and her husband care for their two children by working different hours, and she says that "she could not stay home all the time", though she would ideally like a part time job. She told us how when her brothers came out from Lebanon they were amazed at how she had changed: from being soft and weak, she was now confident, tougher and ready to argue with them! Her brothers said that now they did not have to worry about her any more.

It was clear that many women spent most of their 'spare' time doing household work, and that they were quite aware that their husbands did not carry such a large work load, although in some cases the husbands were studying as well as working. However, rather than seeking to ease the pressure on them by reconstructing the roles that they and their husbands had *within* the household it seemed that women rather attempted to alter the *external* pressures on them as a family - by getting an easier job, working part time or (temporarily) withdrawing from the labour force.

There were two situations, however, that appeared to lead the husbands of the newly arrived women to have a larger domestic role. One was when circumstances forced them to share childcare more equally with their wives - in other words, when it was necessary for the family economy for their wives to do paid work and other female relatives were not on hand to look after the children. In some cases where husbands both had jobs they worked different hours, and looked after the children in shifts. Some women described the daily anxiety of having to leave for work with their children alone in the house asleep for a couple of hours until their husband returned home from his job. In other cases, the women had jobs and unemployed husbands cared for the children.

Secondly, in a few cases women had clearly sought to challenge the traditional division of labour in their households and had tried to persuade or pressure partners to do more housework:

> we do most things equally now; it was a long process; I used to do much more, but now it is pretty even (Chilean woman).

3.8.5 Caring for children

As noted in Chapter One, thirty-seven of the seventy-four recently arrived women had children of pre-school age. Of these, nearly two-thirds (23) were in the workforce (either working or looking for work) at the time of the interview: only 14/37 women had left the workforce to care for their children on a full-time basis. These were usually women with either very young children or more than one child.

> My husband does two jobs to support the family - I do all the housework plus take care of my children (4, 3, 1 1/2) - I don't work now - the housework is busy enough. When my children grow up I will look for a permanent job - but I don't like to work in a factory.(Vietnamese women who had worked as a process worker and a teachers' aide in Australia before having her third child).

Although few agreed to be interviewed, our bilingual research assistants reported knowing of many NESB migrant women with small children who had left their factory jobs and begun doing outwork at home when they had children.

Naturally, the need to have access to childcare was most acute for the employed mothers of very young children; however, a particular woman's childcare needs depended on a number of factors in addition to the age of the child: the hours she worked, whether and what hours were worked by the child's father, the proximity of the parents' jobs to the home. We did not discuss the issue of childcare at any length with the women and it is not possible here to give a comprehensive account of the women's childcare needs. However, it was clear that childcare was a major concern of all mothers and a serious problem for many. For those whose children had grown up (the Italian women) childcare had often been a problem in the past.

The women made a multiplicity of arrangements for the care of their children while they worked. The most common situation was where both parents shared childcare, often, as noted above, alternating their work-times so as to allow one parent to be with the children .

> I work in the morning and he works in the afternoon (Lebanese data-entry operator).

Relatives were the next most common source of childcare. Grandmothers and aunts played a key role in childcare arrangements and their work was often crucial to a woman's ability to have a job. The older Italian women described how their mothers had cared for their children while they worked, sometimes having emigrated from Italy for that purpose; the newly arrived women described similar arrangements.

> I have to take care of the youngest one at home - he is three and a half years old. My mother-in-law cares for him when I'm at work. The children are all right - my mother-in-law helps a lot (Vietnamese women with three children, working full time as a machine operator. Her household comprised her children, husband and husband's mother).

Ten women paid baby-minders in relatively informal arrangements with friends, relatives and neighbours. For example, one Vietnamese woman who sent her two-year old daughter next door to an Anglo-Australian woman with two small children of her own. While these arrangements were usually fairly convenient and relatively cheap

for the mothers who used them, they were also subject to change if the carer was sick, or moved or had a baby.

Institutional childcare was used extremely infrequently by the women - in fact, in only two cases. Very few women seemed even to have investigated it, and few seemed to have much information about it. Expense was the reason given for not using centre-based care - paying relatives, friends or neighbours was cheaper. The length of waiting lists was another factor that made it difficult for the newly arrived women, with discontinuous and unreliable employment to use centres.

Clearly, a great deal of information about the women's lives in Australia and their perceptions of their lives emerged from the interviews that we conducted for this study. While it is hard to do justice to the richness of the interviews in a report such as this, the degree to which women shared similar experiences in the workforce was striking and made our task easier. In the following chapter we identify some of the most important aspects of shared experiences, focusing on those of particular relevance to government policy-making.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Australia!
Promised land
Australia
Beautiful, terrible
fertile and free
How can one not love you,
and at the same time hate you?
....
You opened your doors
and through them entered
thousands of hopes
...To leave their backs
in mines and factories
in stenching kitchens
in vineyards and farms!
To sweep your streets
To clean your lanes
To scrub your floors
with sweat and tears!!
To clean out your filth with tired hands!
...And you think yourself fresh and brilliant?
And tanned, Oh Australia
Beautiful, lazy one
You could think about
Whose hands they are
That make your shine?

'Facing you Australia' by Juanita Mordonez, 1988, from **Voces de la Mujer Latinoamericana**.

Although there is a considerable body of literature on migrant women workers in Australia, this study is the first to focus specifically on the experiences of newly arrived migrant women. It has combined a qualitative survey of NESB women workers from a range of industries, occupations and ethnic groups with a comprehensive appraisal of current knowledge about migrant women in Australia and overseas. Recent census and labour force survey data was analysed to provide further information about the work patterns of NESB migrant women, and especially recently arrived women. Data on NESB women's industrial and occupational position indicates that they still comprise a distinct labour force segment with an employment profile that shares characteristics of both women's and NESB men's labour force profiles, but which differs in important ways from both.

Because the sample group of our survey contained an older group of long-settled Italian women, we have been able to compare the situation of women arriving recently with those who arrived in Australia in the 1950s and early 1960s. And because we interviewed women working in a range of different employment relationships (including full and part-time workers, outworkers, casual and permanent workers) we have been able to explore the experiences of women involved in the range of working-class jobs found in Australia today.

Summing up the findings of the study as a whole, it could be said that there appears to be a great deal of continuity between the experiences and problems of NESB migrant women workers who arrived in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s and those who are arriving now, thirty years later. A striking (if predictable) *difference* is the far greater difficulty which newly arrived migrant women today have in finding paid work, and the insecurity of much of the work that they find. As suggested by the statistical data and strongly confirmed by the women we interviewed, unemployment, retrenchment and underemployment are common aspects of newly arrived migrant women's labour market experiences in 1980s Australia.

This apart, if we look at the nature of the employment and the work relationships in which NESB women are involved, the continuities are more marked than the differences. They indicate a characteristic 'NESB migrant woman worker' experience in post-war Australia that, despite the transformation in public knowledge about it, and the changing economic environment, has itself changed little in the period. There was little relationship between the women's occupations, and the career paths they had embarked on before emigrating and the directions their lives had taken in Australia. Moreover, the fact that, despite the considerable differences in the backgrounds and expectations of the women from different birthplaces in our study *before* they emigrate, their experiences and problems were so similar *after* emigrating suggests the crucial role of the workplace and the labour market in structuring immigrant women's lives.

The need for immigrant women to do paid work, often concurrently with having children, was found to be as acute for women arriving in Australia in the 1980's as it was for new arrivals in earlier years and as it still is for longer settled migrants. Although on arrival in Australia the newly arrived women we interviewed had considerably

better education, more qualifications and more formal workforce experience than the older-settled group, this did not markedly improve their employment outcomes in Australia. These findings appear to substantially discredit the human capital theorists' arguments, discussed in Chapter Two, that immigrant women's experiences in Australia are the simply the result of different 'human capital endowments'.

Analyses of censuses in the last twenty-five years confirm what the women themselves assert: most newly arrived NESB migrant women initially find work in the manufacturing sector, and within manufacturing, disproportionately within the clothing and textile industries. Within these industries they continue to be employed mainly as process workers and machine operators, doing work that is often skilled and difficult, though at the same time repetitive, unrewarding, injurious to health and not socially valued. They earn, typically, considerably less per week than average female weekly earnings and often rely on bonus payments, overtime or a second job to make up a living wage. Overt discrimination and the nature of the division of labour within industry along gender and ethnic lines are barriers to their moving into better jobs over time. The lack of income support for English language learners and the shortage of intensive learning facilities mean that most women cannot afford to delay entering the workforce in order to study and do not therefore attend sufficient classes to become proficient in English. The result is that it often takes many years to obtain the English language skills that employers demand for white-collar and professional jobs. In these respects (as in many others) the experiences of Australian-born and other English speaking background women workers are literally worlds apart from those of migrant women.

4.1 Finding a job, the role of the C.E.S. and the need for vocational guidance

In planning the research for this report, we encountered a popular consensus among the immigrant women we talked to about which jobs were, and which jobs were not, 'migrant women's jobs'; the labour market segmentation so invisible to some of Australia's academics is clearly easier to recognise for those who encounter it in their daily lives. Migrant workers know the jobs that migrant men and women from different countries perform in Australia and use this knowledge to help friends and compatriots

get work. Despite the existence of the government-run and reasonably extensive Commonwealth Employment Service, migrant women today, as in past years, are more likely to find a job through a friend or relative; often in the same factory or company as the latter.

This does not *cause* labour market segmentation: the non-recognition and low evaluation of women's prior work experiences or qualifications, the inadequacy of English language teaching systems in Australia and discrimination are some of the reasons for the latter. However, the use of informal networks as a means of finding work is a conservative mechanism in the sense that it helps to *maintain* labour market segmentation: newly arriving women are channelled into the types of industries and jobs that their cousins, sisters and aunts have had before them. While naturally the existence and assistance of their own ethnic community in settling in to life in Australia (of which finding work is one aspect) is valuable and important to newly arriving migrants, some women also expressed their dissatisfaction with being almost automatically steered towards certain jobs, especially where taking a job brought with it a feeling of obligation to their 'helper' and/or the employer.

While for almost all the women in our sample the urgency to find paid work catapulted them into an industrial or other manual job - any job - as soon as one could be found and childcare arranged, many had aspirations and ambitions beyond blue-collar work for which it appears that they currently obtain little support. Several of the Vietnamese and Latin American women had been students, or had begun a tertiary degree in their own country before emigrating to Australia and wanted to finish their studies, or begin new ones, in Australia. Other women - for example, some of the Italian clothing outworkers - were interested in setting up their own businesses, selling directly to the public. However, the women did not regard the C.E.S. as a source of information or support in these initiatives; indeed, few considered the C.E.S. to be currently much help in finding jobs for migrant women at all.

There are three important implications of these findings:

- First, the C.E.S. needs to lift its profile among NESB migrant women, many of whom either do not know about its services or have the wrong information about them. It is important that all newly arrived migrants, not just those passing

through migrant hostels or A.M.E.S. receive adequate information about the C.E.S.

- Secondly, it appears that the C.E.S. needs to improve the standard of the services it provides to migrant women, many of whom in our study were extremely critical of its failure to help them find jobs.
- Thirdly, the C.E.S. should have an active role in providing general vocational guidance and support for NESB women - a role that goes beyond simply referring women to advertised jobs. Alerting women to the existence of jobs outside the traditional areas of factory jobs and 'domestic sector' jobs (cleaning, kitchen work and laundering); liaising between employers, the women and the A.M.E.S. to overcome job barriers due to lack of English language skills, providing opportunities and assisting women into entrepreneurial activities independently of their husbands are some of the roles that the C.E.S. could play with regard to migrant women that would usefully supplement the women's current reliance on informal ethnic networks.

Although the results of our study suggest that it does not currently appear to perform such functions, these recommendations are in line with government objectives of broadening the C.E.S.'s education and training guidance role and providing special assistance to immigrant clients as outlined in the Department of Employment, Education and Training Access and Equity Plan (OMA 1988b: 5).

4.2 Labour market segmentation and equal employment opportunity

While the above recommendations are ones that could easily be put into place in the medium-term, other desirable reforms are of a more structural nature, attacking endemic inequalities in patterns of employment in Australia. Emerging from this study as an area where such initiatives are needed is the segmentation of the labour market, both externally within the economy as a whole, and internally, within particular enterprises.

As mentioned above, the women we interviewed were painfully aware of both. Within the economy generally, many commented that migrant women did the worst jobs, some ironically relating their experiences to Australia's international image:

> I feel that there is little opportunity for migrants in general in Australia, and women suffer most: the myth of Australia as a 'lucky country' is not true (Mexican woman, clothing machinist).

Within their enterprise one of the most common forms of discrimination to which women referred was structural discrimination in the type of jobs different ethnic groups had and the different tasks they were given to do. Half of the women who had worked in workplaces where English speaking women were also employed believed that the latter were treated differently and better than migrant women. (The fact that one-third of the women in the sample had had no experience in working with Anglophone women is itself, of course, indicative of the segmentation in the workforce along ethnic lines).

Moreover, the employment histories of the women in our study suggested that while migrant women move quite frequently between jobs of a similar status (e.g. between different factory or other blue-collar jobs), they have much less opportunity for upward social mobility into better paid, more stable, lighter, more interesting jobs that are more socially esteemed. True of the long-settled women in our sample, it appears that this pattern is being repeated among newly arrived immigrant women despite the latter's better pre-migration education and formal qualifications. In other words, downward social mobility, on arriving in Australia, was rapid and rarely avoidable; upward social mobility, however, was a far less common and much slower process.

Currently, in line with the 1988 National Wage Case decision linking wages policy to industrial restructuring, the reform of the Australian industrial relations system is taking place with major implications for the design of jobs and the workplace division of labour. Although, at the time of writing, award restructuring has progressed furthest in a male-dominated field, the metals industry, several industries with high proportions of women workers have also taken initiatives in this area. Of most interest to NESB women is the award restructuring in the TCF industries and in other areas of manufacturing as well as in community services and the retail industry (Department of Industrial Relations 1989 and Women's Bureau 1989). This process has the potential to

dismantle the barriers which currently lock women into low-paid, low status jobs because skill audits can potentially lead to the recognition of women's previously unrecognised work skills. In addition, the award restructuring exercise can potentially involve greater pay equity for 'women's work', the building of career structures in previously non-career areas, expanded training options for all job classifications and the redesign of jobs to incorporate components from higher level jobs (Women's Bureau 1989: 268 et passim). However, it is not a foregone conclusion that such changes will come about; as the Women's Bureau comments:

> There is a growing concern that women will be casualties in many forms of industry restructuring ... much of this change involves a shrinking core of more highly skilled workers ... while many lesser skilled women workers are retrenched and/ or enter the growing secondary labour market (1989: 275).

In addition to the economic arguments for breaking down labour market segmentation (that is, the enhancement of the skill base in Australia, the creation of a more flexible and creative workforce, the better utilisation of existing skills etc.) there are strong social justice arguments for the implementation of micro-economic reform at the workplace in a way that will break down the current industrial and occupational ghettoisation of NESB migrant women workers. Efforts to combat racism at work, for example, must start by breaking down occupational and industrial barriers between workers from different ethnic backgrounds, since prejudices and hostilities will not be eliminated while some groups are locked into the worst jobs where they are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and victimisation. Clearly, this is where, at the policy level, equal employment opportunity initiatives and anti-racist strategies come together. The former have, until now, focused mainly on the public sector and on white-collar jobs - avoiding precisely those areas where structural inequality is most entrenched. Greater attention to improving training opportunities for migrant women, and to providing more vocational English and bridging courses for those trained overseas would increase the proportion of newly arrived women who could work in Australia in their area of expertise, rather than being forced to enter the less skilled, lower status jobs described in this study.

4.3 Work conditions: another old story

In the area of the working environment and conditions of work generally, our study has again yielded fresh evidence of old problems. It does not offer an encouraging picture of improvement over time, although much Australian literature from the 1970s on has documented the unacceptable nature of conditions under which migrant women work. The problems of unpleasant, dirty, airless, noisy workplaces that are too hot in summer and too cold in winter, of dangerous work processes which lead to a high number of accidents and a higher number of work-related diseases over time, and employers' lack of attention to workers' comfort in matters as small as the provision of a stool or toilet paper that characterised the workplaces of migrant women in the 1970s appear still to be commonplace.

In the area of award conditions, the major group not receiving their legitimate entitlements were those working at home. Our study suggests that while some women (in our case, the older-settled Italian women) do outwork on a relatively permanent basis, temporary spells of outwork are common among many other women including newly arrived women who have not been able to locate other work. Much has been written about outwork in Australia (see Chapter Two) and our study, here too, provided fresh evidence of exploitation rather than new findings. It should be said, however, that for some women, outwork was considered to be a viable form of employment which they chose in preference to factory work. This was mainly the case for women who did not have young children: the severe problems, and also the dangers, involved in combining paid work at home with caring for children were emphasised by several women.

Unlike the outworkers in our sample, the other workers mostly appeared to receive standard award conditions in the areas of sick pay, holiday, leave and daily work breaks. In other areas (long-service leave and superannuation), women were less sure of their entitlements or of what was given at their workplace, and only approximately one-third said they received (or would receive) each.

An area which has received relatively little attention in the literature and which emerged from our study as being of particular relevance to migrant women is maternity leave. Only twenty-seven out of the ninety-one working women interviewed said that

they were entitled to maternity leave at their workplace. (Most did not know whether the leave was paid or unpaid). Thus, more than two-thirds of the women either did not know whether they were entitled to maternity leave or did not think that they were. At the same time, pregnancy, childbirth and the need to care for small children was a major reason why women left jobs, coming second only to dislike of the job itself. In thirty-eight cases women had resigned from a job for child-related reasons. Although job security was a major issue for many, very few of these women had ever received *maternity leave; as noted above, few knew of its existence or whether they were* entitled to it.

Sex-based harassment is clearly another area where there is clearly an urgent need for information/education campaigns that reach employers and trade unions as well as NESB migrant women workers.

Three simultaneous approaches are needed to address the problems with work environment and work conditions described above.

- First, if the industrial awards relevant to the areas where NESB migrant women work and/or state industrial legislation do not provide for a minimum standard of benefits (e.g. in the case of maternity leave) government policy should be directed towards establishing such standards nationally across all industries and occupations.
- Secondly, there needs to be a significant increase in NESB migrant women's knowledge of their award entitlements and their other rights as workers. Campaigns should be run to alert migrant women working in industry and in other blue-collar jobs to the working conditions that they have the right to expect in Australia and what recourse they have when employers avoid, or refuse to provide, these conditions. Such campaigns should be run by the Federal and State Governments, in conjunction with trade unions, and should utilise the ethnic media as well as bilingual community educators. There are several examples of active community education projects that have produced good results with ethnic minority women, including the workplace health information projects running in N.S.W. and Victoria and the occupational health information campaigns run in Victoria. Such projects, which combine

information-giving with practical assistance and advocacy, should be reviewed and developed for their application nationally.

- Thirdly, there needs to be a far greater regulatory effort directed towards industry. Small enterprises in manufacturing, industries such as clothing where outwork is widespread and industries such as the fast-food and restaurant industry where casual and part-time work is common should be monitored more rigorously to ensure that standards of health and safety are adhered to and award conditions applied. *In the light of current governmental moves, most* marked at the state level, towards deregulation, it is of particular importance that the Office of Multicultural Affairs explains and promotes the need to *increase* the extent and rigour of the regulation of industrial work conditions.

4.4 Trade unions

While the women in this study reported facing a diversity of problems at the workplace a common feature of many problems was the difficulty that the women had in fighting unjust or unfair situations. In confronting racism or sex-based harassment at the workplace, in obtaining their award entitlements or in attempting to obtain a healthy and safe working environment, or in situations where they had been unfairly sacked, the women frequently described factors that made it particularly difficult for them to challenge their situation:

> ... the workers that could speak English could protect themselves better, for example, they only worked the time they were paid; even if the job was not done they could argue with the bosses. In my case, I always felt that it was my responsibility to finish it, I was under great pressure from my relatives not to lose the job...The lack of knowledge of the language and your rights exposes you to pushing yourself more than you need to. The bosses take advantage of this.

> The government should have a system in which migrant women would not have to go to work as soon as they arrived, and therefore would not be exposed to work abuses (Chilean women discussing their experience of paid work in Australia).

The women's lack of fluency in English and their lack of information about possible sources of help, as well as their relative powerlessness as employees in relation to employers, supervisors, leading hands or middlemen put them at a structural

disadvantage in standing up for their rights. Also apparent from the women's comments, and well-documented elsewhere, was the small role played by the trade union movement in supporting NESB migrant women in such situations.

The women in our study worked in areas covered by a variety of trade unions and approximately two-thirds were, or had been, union members. However, very few had had much contact with the union during their working lives in Australia and few thought that the union covering their industry did a good job in representing their interests. Women who had had pre-migration experience with trade unions (in particular the Latin American women) were the most critical; however, women from all backgrounds criticised the unions for their inactivity and for not listening to the workers' demands. Indeed, some felt that their union worked more closely with the management than with the workers: in the case of the Vietnamese women, 'White' union representatives were often seen as being aligned with 'White' employers rather than with the Asian workers.

Although a significant number of outworkers were union members, or had been union members in the past, it seemed that the unions had been able to do little to protect their interests and few had had contact with them other than the receipt of union literature.

It seems that one important strategy in helping trade unions to be more responsive to, and to better advocate on behalf of, NESB women workers could be the training of migrant women from the shopfloor as union delegates and officers. Not only would bilingual union representatives clearly be an asset in workplaces where few women are proficient in English, but the more frequent recruitment of NESB migrant women would overcome the gender and cultural gaps between the experiences of the union membership and the attitudes of those who represent them. Government funding should be directed towards subsidising and encouraging such initiatives by unions, labour councils and the Trade Union Training Authority, and employers' support should be sought at least to the extent of releasing migrant women workers to participate in such schemes.

4.5 Unemployment

As discussed above, difficulty finding paid work has emerged from this study as one of the major problems facing newly arrived NESB women in Australia. Although most women said that they were prepared to take any job, and although the jobs they took frequently represented a significant downward step compared to the job they had had in their own country, many had spent months looking for work and then had the experience of being retrenched as the workforce at their factory was reduced or the factory itself closed down.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to examine the causes of or remedies for unemployment in Australia, the existence of this major problem should be noted by governments in the context of immigration policy and plans for increasing immigration intakes in future years.

In addition, all possible resources should be devoted to assisting migrants already in Australia to move out of declining areas such as manufacturing and into areas where there is greater employment scope. This may involve simply making it possible for migrant women to work in the fields in which they had training or experience before emigrating to Australia. The findings of this study indicate that this is currently rarely the case. Similarly, women should be encouraged to complete studies begun overseas and interrupted as a result of emigration and/or political persecution. Encouragement in this context would need to involve financial support and the provision of appropriate English -as-a-Second Language courses.

In general, more active labourpower policies on the part of the government are essential if the disadvantaged position of NESB migrant women in the labour market is to be overcome.

4.6 Childcare and family support

Although the majority of the women interviewed in this study had families, and many worked in paid employment concurrently with bringing up small children for whom they had the major responsibility, very few women (2) had ever used institutional

childcare arrangements. Most relied instead on relatives to look after their children while they worked or else they and their husbands juggled working and being at home with the children. The latter strategy meant that the parents rarely had time together in the family and was a major cause of strained marital relationships. Private arrangements involving paying a friend or a known compatriot to care for children also appear to be common.

The most common view expressed about public institutional childcare was that it was too expensive; however, it seemed that few NESB women investigated the possibilities in this area. Several women had given up their jobs because of the need to care for small children; but the world of childcare centres seemed to be unfamiliar to the women. The main reasons would appear to be the difficulty in getting a place in a childcare centres, particularly at short notice; their uneven geographical distribution (i.e. the lack of centres in the western suburbs) and the women's ignorance about how to use public services generally.

It seems that chain migration and extended family reunion are practices which provide some migrant women with free or cheap support mechanisms which, if provided adequately by governments would be extremely costly. This is a finding of relevance to immigration policy, although the role of the extended family in childcare should not be overstated or romanticised[10]. Juggling childcare between their and their husbands' jobs remained the most common way that the women we interviewed coped with having to earn money concurrently with raising a family, and the stresses that resulted point to the need for better solutions.

It is clear that existing public childcare is not currently accessible to many NESB migrant women. On equity grounds, these women should be encouraged to use such facilities, although in practice, the facilities themselves would need to be considerably expanded before more people could be invited to make use of them. The

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10 Our bilingual interviewers reported the common phenomenon of conflict developing between an immigrant couple and their parents who they had sponsored to Australia. While the former expect their old folk to assist them by looking after their children while they worked, the 'imported' parents often develop the desire to live their own lives in Australia and come to resent their grown up children's constant demands for unpaid labour.

greater provision of after-school care is one area of need for working migrant women that should be investigated.

AFTERWORD: A NOTE ON RESEARCHINGMIGRANT WOMEN

While we succeeded in reaching our target sample size for this project, we found it quite difficult to do so. We believe that some comment on the type of research strategy used in this project is necessary.

The strategy we adopted is one common to multicultural research, and indeed to research in other areas focusing on the needs and problems of relatively powerless groups in society, or on groups whose voices have traditionally not been well-represented in public discourse. It aims to obtain an understanding of a given situation by asking the subjects themselves for their views, usually by conducting a large number of interviews or running group discussions. Research of this type emphasises the subjective understandings that people have of their situation. The rationale is similar in some ways to that behind the forums and 'speak outs' described in Chapter Two; it is often represented as a democratic and egalitarian research strategy, in contrast to the traditional empiricist, scientistic methods that rely simply on observable phenomena and quantitative data.

This is not the place to enter into a detailed discussion of methodological issues. We believe that it is both essential and extremely fruitful to investigate people's own perceptions of a situation, and it is hoped that this report has demonstrated the value to policy-makers of so doing. However, some practical and political issues affect the appropriateness of this method for use on large scale projects and across all research topics.

Despite the fact that in our study the women were contacted almost always through an intermediary (friend, relative or community worker) whom they knew, at least half of those contacted declined to be interviewed. We believe that many had good reasons for refusing; that is, reasons that should be taken seriously.

Generally, the women we approached were simply wary - they did not wish to engage in an activity where there was a risk of drawing attention to themselves or their situation. Because of the low wages they typically earned, the unemployment of their

husbands, and the nature of the Australian social security system, it seems that a proportion of women cope by working semi-legally - (for example, as a 'black' cleaning worker, receiving cash payments, as an unregistered outworker, or earning a (small) undeclared wage while their husbands receive unemployment benefits). Needless to say, these practices do not result in the women becoming 'rich' or even comfortable; they are survival strategies, and result in constant feelings of vulnerability and fear on their part. Indeed, this very vulnerability and fear themselves often work to put the women in a position of being further exploited: as, for example, in the case of the injured worker who does not wish to pursue a claim for compensation because her husband is a social security recipient.

In addition, several women were receiving, or were seeking to receive, workers' compensation and were scared of unwittingly giving us information that could be used against them. Others who were engaged in outwork had been told by their employers not to tell anyone about it! Another concern was that their employer would discover that they had revealed his unsavoury practices and dismiss them. Both the Vietnamese and the Lebanese interviewers reported being refused by women because the latter were ashamed of the jobs that they had been forced into taking in Australia and did not want to discuss them. Finally, some women were simply cynical about the value of government research. (Some communities have by now had considerable exposure to 'being studied' and often feel that little action eventuates from the research).

One woman agreed to being interviewed, participated in a long discussion and then, the following day, telephoned the interviewer to say that friends had advised her against taking part in such research and that she did not want the interview to be used. Although she clearly trusted the interviewer on a personal level, she was anxious about the repercussions of a report which drew on her personal experiences. In other cases, the women's husbands discouraged or forbade their wives from being interviewed - resulting in the cancellation of arranged interviews at the last moment.

Apart from the time-consuming consequences of these problems for researchers such as ourselves, the situation also raises certain questions about the nature of the sample. Did those who did agree to be interviewed represent a relatively more secure, less vulnerable and less marginalised group within the population of newly arrived NESB women? What is the truth value of the information that women gave us in the

interviews? Our interviewers reported, for example, the fact that some women who were illegal immigrants pointedly did not disclose this fact in the interview. (The interviewers knew from other sources, and of course we did not use this information in our study).

At the most obvious level, it is clear that a long lead time must be allowed for projects of this type, in order to allow for the high refusal rate of potential respondents. However, we suggest that in the future it would also be valuable, and would impose less on the women, to use other research strategies. For example, observational studies of the micro-processes of work relations in a factory employing large numbers of migrant women would yield very interesting results. Researchers could adopt the role of participants, working together with the women in the factory for a few months; or researchers could simply spend time in the factory environment observing, talking, interviewing etc.

Another research tactic could involve a researcher or researchers shadowing those who already have contact with the subject group (in this case migrant women), such as union organisers or even personnel staff. These forms of research would require the making of certain demands on the relevant parties - that is, employers, unions etc.; but these demands are no more than are imposed on the subjects of study in cases such as our research. It could be argued that employers and trade unions are in a far less vulnerable position than the migrant women who have been persuaded and cajoled to participate in numerous research studies in Australia in recent years. Such studies would allow first hand examination of the work and other power relations entered into in by a group of people, and thereby produce a more dynamic picture than those relying on one party's perceptions only.

To conclude, we feel that there is a limit to how much and how often researchers should seek to pressure people in highly vulnerable circumstances to participate in research whose benefits to them are not directly evident. Alternatives should also be sought.

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Contents

A. Women and Work - General

B. Migrant Women - Women and Multiculturalism

C. Women and Work - Migrant Women

D. Outworkers

E. Migrant Workers and Ethnic Affairs

F. International Literature

G. Miscellaneous Literature

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE: Non-English speaking background migrant women in the workforce

Interviewer(s): **Date:**

Introduction:

We are conducting a study for the Federal Government on the experiences of immigrant women in the workforce. They want to know in detail of the problems that they meet - particularly women who have come to Australia recently. At the end of the study we will make recommendations to the Government about how the situation could be improved for immigrant women in Australia.

This questionnaire is confidential; nothing that could identify a respondent, workplace or employer will be used in our report.

1. Country of birth:

2. Do you come from a village, small town or large town/city?

3. Age:

4. What language(s) do you speak most fluently?

5. How many years of schooling did you complete (in your own country)?:

6. Do you have any post-school training or qualifications?
   If so, What?:
   Where from (i.e what country)?

7. In what year did you arrive in Australia to live?

8. (a) What was your occupation before you came to Australia?:
   (i.e. school, job, work at home etc.)
   (describe)
   (prompt: Did you do any paid work before you came to Australia?)
   (b) How many years did you work for?

9. (a) Did you plan to get a job straight away when you arrived in Australia?
   (b) Why/why not?

10. Are you: single?
    married? separated or divorced?
    not married, living in a stable relationship?

If married, before or after coming to Australia?

11. What are your main sources of income?
(e.g. your wage, your partner's wage, pension or benefit etc.)
Which kind of pension? (unemployment, widow's etc)

12. Do you have children?
If so, How many?
What are their ages?

13. How soon after you arrived in Australia did you look for a job?
(explain why this period of time)

14. Could you tell me a bit about the work you've done since you've been in Australia?

	FIRST JOB	SECOND JOB
Type of job:		
How job was found:		
Period worked:		
Reason(s) for leaving job:		
Other comments:		

	THIRD JOB	OTHER JOBS
Type of job:		
How job was found:		
Period worked:		
Reason(s) for leaving job:		
Other comments:		

15. Which job did you like the best? Why?

16. How difficult have you found the work in the (cleaning/ clothing etc) industry?
(explain e.g. heavy, dirty, boring etc)

17. Have you found it difficult or easy to find work in Australia?
(Probe: Has it taken you long to find your jobs? What problems did you encounter?)

18. Are you currently doing paid work?
If so, what is your job? (give some details of what job involves):
part-time, full-time or casual?
describe your workplace - (i.e. work at home, in a small or large factory, in other people's homes etc):
If not, are you currently looking for paid work?
How long have you been looking?

The next questions are about your job in the (cleaning/clothing etc) industry

19. (a) Do you like your job?
(b) Why/ why not?

Travel arrangements

20. (a) How do you travel to and from work?
(b) Do you have difficulty getting to or from work?
(explain)

21. Did problems in travelling to work affect your choice of job?
(in other words, were you looking for a job in a particular area?)
(explain)

Pay

22. What hours do you usually work in a week?
(Probe: shiftwork?)

23. Could you tell me what you usually earn in a week?
(Check whether that includes overtime)

24. (a) Are you satisfied with the pay in your present job?
(b) Why/Why not?

Working conditions

25. Do you get:
(a) Tea breaks? (describe):
(b) Sick pay?
(c) Paid holidays?
How many weeks/year?
(d) Long service leave?
(e) Maternity leave?
(f) Superannuation?

26. When you first started this job, were you given information about that award conditions you are entitled to?
(expand; was an interpreter available or used?)

27. Have you ever been injured at work?
(describe)
If yes, Did you receive workers' compensation?
(expand)

28. Do you think that your job has any effects on your health generally?
(Probe: aches and pains, repetition strain injury/tenosynovitis, tiredness; the chemicals used etc.)
(Describe):

29. What is your opinion of the working conditions in your industry?
(explain)

Your employer(s)

30. **(If employer known to respondent)** What nationality is your employer?
(and/or) What nationality is your supervisor? the leading hand?

31. (a) How would you describe the way that your employers treat the workers in your factory?
(b) Do you think that migrant women are treated differently to Australian-born workers?
(explain)

32. Have you ever had any disagreements or problems with the employers or supervisors in your company?
(explain)

Other workers

33. What nationality are the other women who you work with?

34. (a) Are there men doing the same work as you?
(b) Why /why not?
(c) What nationality are the male employees in your company?

35. How would you describe the relationship between the people you work with?
(prompt: friendly, little contact, hostile etc.)

36. Have you noticed any prejudiced attitudes or racism towards migrants at your workplace amongst either the bosses or the other workers?
(describe)

If yes,

(a) How do people react to those who behave in a racist manner?
(e.g. complain to the supervisor or to the union, Anti-discrimination Board?)

(b) Has the racism ever affected you personally?
(explain)

Trade unions

37. (a) Are you a union member?
(b) Why/why not?
(c) If yes, which union?

38. What contact have you had with the union since you started this job?
(prompt: have you received union literature, seen a union organiser, been to a union meeting, contacted the union yourself about something?)

39. Do you think that the union in your industry does a good job?
(explain)

If woman worked before coming to Australia,

40. Did you have more or less contact with the trade union when you worked before coming to Australia?

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment - that is, male bosses or other employees making sexual comments or advances to women workers - is sometimes a problem in Australian workplaces.

42. Have you ever come across this in your current or other jobs?
(describe)
Has it ever affected you personally?
If yes, How did you respond?
(e.g. did you complain to the union or the boss?)

Learning English

43. Could you speak English before you came to Australia?
How well?

44. Would you say your knowledge of English is:

very good?	fair?
good?	poor?

45. Have you attended English classes since you've been in Australia?
If yes, when and where?
If no,

46. How have you learnt English?

47. Do you think that having a job helps you learn English or prevents you from learning quickly?
(explain)

Family responsibilities

48. **If appropriate,** What is your partner's occupation?
(note whether he works at the same factory)

49. Who lives in your household other than you?

50. Who does most of the housework in your household?
(Probe: what about the shopping? cleaning? cooking? Does your husband do much housework? what about the children?)

If respondent has children,

51. What arrangements do you have for looking after the children?

52. (a) How do you find combining your paid job with your family/household responsibilities?
    (b) Do you think that, since you've had a job, your relationship with your husband has changed?
    (explain)
    If husband works at the same workplace, How does this affect you?

53. Does your husband encourage you to have a job or would he prefer you to stay at home?
    (explain)

54. If it wasn't for the money, would you still like to have a job?
    (explain)

55. Do you have any other comments about your experiences in the workforce since you've come to Australia?

Thank you for your help.

Notes
(including religion if known for Arabic women)

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ISSN 1035-8129

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